

truth conquers all by cigarettestainedeyes

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Summary:

the college hazing fic nobody asked for

or

the one where steve gets auctioned off to billy for his last round of initiation. it couldn't be that bad, right?

1. Read The Fine Print

Steve had been through hell. It had been two weeks of rough initiation, of being woken up in the middle of the night surrounded by masked fraternity brothers, dragged from bed and made to stand in nothing but his boxers in a chilly, abandoned warehouse while he answered historical questions about the school, and also a few stupid ones like ‘what female celebrity did a previous group member impregnate one year?’; been forced to drink raw eggs with cayenne pepper while not plugging his nose to hide the taste; a night of drinking hard liquor until he blacked out and being told to drink even more; a horrible evening of paddling which had been embarrassing and painful, and now this.

He stood, once again in nothing but his boxers, this time in the school auditorium. There were ten pledges left, and six would get spots in the fraternity. He’d made it this far and wasn’t going to back out now. There had originally been twenty-six pledges and he’d fought tooth and nail to make it this far. He was mentally exhausted and almost wondered what the point was of joining a stupid fraternity but as other pledges kept reminding him, these connections would help him tremendously in the future. It was a guaranteed job, security, unlimited wealth and power. He had to see it through.

Steve swallowed nervously and shifted a bit where he stood. The lights pointing at them were bright and hot and he couldn’t see the audience. He knew it was just the fraternity brothers, god only knew how they’d managed to secure time in the auditorium and they occupied the first couple of rows in the middle of the theater.

Around his neck he wore a number written on a piece of cardboard that was hanging on a bit of rope. The leader of the fraternity, Chad (because of course his name was Chad of all things) was a tall, broad-shouldered blonde with striking blue eyes and he weaved between

the boys, poking at them and announcing numbers one at a time into the mic. Steve didn't know how he could see who was bidding, but people definitely were and one by one, each boy was auctioned off to a current member of the fraternity. Steve was itching to know what for. Were they meant to be slaves for a week? To be chosen to do chores for the house? Something worse?

Chad was in front of him before he knew it. "Number twenty-three, boys. He's the pretty one, whoever wins him will be in for a real treat, I'm sure." Chad smirked at him, reaching out and snapping the elastic band of his boxers.

Steve's face flooded red as he heard a few boys whistle and catcall. This was not going to be good. His heart pounded in his ears and it was the only sound he could hear for the next couple of minutes. He felt nauseous as he heard boys yell out higher and higher numbers. Steve couldn't place the voices at all and as he was sold off to the highest bidder, a smattering of applause sounded, only increasing his nerves.

The last boy was auctioned away and Chad strode over to stand in the middle of them. "Alright, gentlemen. The pledges will be waiting in their bedrooms for your arrival tonight. You all know the rules. Make it count." The way he'd said it made Steve break out in goosebumps.

The pledges left the stage in a state of dazed confusion. A couple of them muttered to each other, maybe talking about what might happen to them, maybe trying to figure out a way out of this whole thing -- which was impossible. Once you were pledged, you completed the tasks given to you. If you didn't, you received demerits from the school, something they believed would inflict discipline and the ability to follow-through, a predecessor to the real world, a life

lesson. It was bullshit.

Steve could hardly keep from fidgeting the rest of the late afternoon as he attempted to clean his room and finish an assignment for his biology class. Night came too quickly and he resorted to sitting on his bed, pulling at the collar of his shirt and jumping a little every time he heard a noise outside his bedroom door. The room he currently occupied was small, laughably small with a tiny window looking out over the campus and a cramped closet that barely fit everything he owned. He bit at his lip and mulled over his current situation. If he denied his bidder whatever it was that was expected of him, he'd remain in this small room until he graduated. If he did as told, he'd be moved into a lavish, spacious house with brothers for life. He'd be set *for life*.

He caught his eye in the tiny, circular mirror near his door. "Suck it up, Harrington." He told himself.

A knock at his door made his head snap towards it. He stood quickly, pulling at the hem of his shirt and making a last-minute escape plan in his head.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck." He chanted quietly.

A second, harsher knock had him in front of his door a second later, gripping the knob and opening it abruptly.

Out of the entire frat house, he wasn't prepared to see Billy Hargrove standing there, leaning on his doorframe, looking at Steve intently. He was smirking, showing off his perfect, white teeth and running his

tongue along his bottom lip. His eyes raked down over Steve and when their eyes met again, Billy fucking *winked*. He was wearing a dark red button-down that was almost completely open, his signature necklace and a long earring with a feather. He always seemed to dress a tad ostentatious for the frat house but Billy Hargrove came from a legacy and the house hadn't had much choice in letting him join.

"Harrington, evening." He nodded and walked forward, not waiting for an invitation.

Steve backed up and didn't reply as Billy shut the door behind him. "Uh...h-hi, Billy." He tried to think of the interactions they had shared in the past two weeks. They had been few and far between, he didn't understand why Billy had bid for him.

"Tonight you will call me Sir." Billy instructed. He raised his eyebrows at Steve when there was a long pause.

"Uh...yes, Sir." Steve mumbled, face bright red. It was suddenly unbearably hot in the room. He thought about opening the window. He then noticed Billy was holding a video camera. "What's...that for?" He asked. Billy cleared his throat roughly. "Sir." Steve quickly amended, looking at the floor.

Billy walked around Steve, setting the camera on his dresser, turning it on and aiming it at the bed. "It's to document our activities, that way the brothers know it actually happened, that we didn't get talked out of our duty."

"And, um...what exactly...Sir, is going to happen?" Steve didn't like

where this was headed.

Billy turned around, sending Steve a dangerous smile while he undid the only closed button on his shirt. Sliding his arms out of it, he let it fall to the floor. "You're going to let me fuck you, Stevie."

Billy's toothy grin did nothing to soothe Steve's nerves, and at the announcement he found himself dizzy.

"W...what?" He murmured, eyes glossing over.

Billy let the 'Sir' slide that time and went to undo the button of his jeans. He flicked them open and Steve saw a flash of hair. *Commando*. His face was getting hotter by the second.

"B-but I'm not, you're not...S-Sir, I --" Gay, he meant to say.

"It's tradition, princess. Every pledge in the last stretch gets fucked by a current member. Don't do it, no entry. Pussy out halfway, no entry. Fail to *satisfy*-" Billy's grin returned, and there was a dangerous glint in his eye.

"No entry." Steve supplied, voice cracking.

Billy laughed darkly. "Pants off, get on the bed."

Steve could leave. He could tell Billy to get the fuck out. But...but...he needed these connections, he needed a future he could count on. He didn't have a choice.

Gulping, red and shaky, he undid the buttons on his pants and let them fall. He stared at the floor while he stepped out of them, ashamed and hesitant as he reached down and took his socks off. He eyed the camera on his dresser for a second before realizing Billy was standing right beside him, heat pooling from his body.

"Take off the boxers too, then get on the bed." He instructed. Steve grunted. "What was that?" Billy asked sharply.

"Yes, Sir." Steve responded through grit teeth and slid his boxers off, walking slowly over to the bed.

Billy lit up a cigarette as Steve situated himself. He almost protested but managed to catch himself. He wasn't allowed to be insubordinate on tonight of all nights. One wrong move and Billy could tell the others he was out. He swallowed the reprimand on the tip of his tongue and stared straight ahead, choosing not to look at Billy.

"Here," he felt something hit his thigh. Glancing, he realized Billy had thrown a small tube of lubricant at him.

He stared at it stupidly, then looked up at Billy. "Sir, what...what am I supposed to --"

"Finger yourself." Billy said around the cigarette dangling from his mouth, rolling his eyes at the instruction he had to give. He took off his necklace and placed it carefully beside the video camera.

Steve's throat clicked as he attempted to swallow before he opened the tube, feeling numb. He squirted some onto his fingers. It was cold and he flinched. He rubbed his fingers together, hoping to warm it up but Billy was impatient. He let out an irritated sound and gruffly took his pants off, walking over to Steve and getting onto the bed, pushing Steve's thighs apart. He took the cigarette out of his mouth, blowing smoke up towards the ceiling and for some insane reason, Steve felt his dick twitch. *Traitor*, he thought to himself. Billy stubbed the cigarette out on Steve's nightstand.

"Hold up your knees, c'mon." Billy said, widening the gap between his thighs.

Steve was exposed and vulnerable, felt all the dignity he had left drain from his body. Billy grabbed his wrist and brought it down until Steve felt his fingers brush over his hole. He jerked at the feeling.

Billy smiled wolfishly down at him. "I knew you'd be fun." He groaned, and Steve saw that Billy was already fully hard. *Fuck*, Billy was going to put his dick inside him.

Steve prodded at his entrance without being told, *quick and dirty*, he thought to himself. Just let Billy do what he needed to do then Steve could kick him out. He pushed past the ring of muscle, letting out a stuttered gasp. It was weird, it was foreign, Steve had never --

He grunted as Billy pushed at his hand, forcing the finger deeper.

“Bill--Sir,” he caught himself, “I-I don’t know what I’m doing, I’ve never--”

“God, you’re a real tight-ass, aren’t you, Stevie.” Billy snorted, finding amusement in his own pun and pushing Steve’s fingers away. He sat back on his hunches and squirted lube onto his fingers.

He didn’t wait to warm it up, just stuck two below, massaging Steve’s hole for a moment before slipping one in, pushing deeper and deeper. Steve arched his back and his hands gripped at the sheets.

“F-fuck,” He groaned, moving his head back and forth. It just felt so odd to him.

Billy added a second finger and pulled them apart, and Steve could feel Billy’s dick on his inner thigh. It was hot and wet traces of precum kept slicking up the skin there. His face burned, felt it running down his chest. He knew Billy could see it too.

“You gonna be good for me, hmm, pledge?” The last word was spat out, almost viciously.

“Y-yes, Sir.” Steve wondered who had fucked Billy. It was a fleeting thought he had right before the fingers were removed and he felt his ass clenching at something that wasn’t there.

Billy lined up his dick and Steve briefly thought about condoms but held his tongue. Billy pushed in and Steve let out a whimper of defeat as he felt himself being breached. It was hard, and hot. Steve shut his eyes tightly but they popped open as Billy broke past the resistance, Steve's breath coming out rapidly, chest heaving.

"What's our motto?" Billy grunted, starting to drag his dick in and out, creating an unbelievable sensation.

Steve couldn't think straight as Billy picked up his pace. "*Ah! Ah! I-I can't-ah!*" He felt a sharp smack at his inner thigh and his dick twitched again. God, he must've been some kind of masochist.

"The motto, pledge." Billy repeated, hitting a spot inside Steve that made his toes curl.

"V-veritas! Om-Omnia -- *fuuck* -- Vincit!" Steve gasped between thrusts.

Billy suddenly had a hand in Steve's hair, and a brutal grasp on it. "What do you call me, pledge?"

"Sir! God, I'm sorry, S-Sir! Steve shouted.

"You're so loud, Stevie." Billy hummed, taking hold of Steve's wrists and pinning them down as he continued to work his cock in. He was

pushing down, mouth closing in over Steve's, covering the boy's seemingly needy moans with his tongue.

Steve's head went a bit fuzzy. There was a hot burst of pleasure that swept through him as their mouths mingled, breath exchanged and teeth pricked lips. He only just then realized how hard he was, how his dick was smacking against his stomach with every thrust. It was degrading. He was getting *off* on this treatment.

The camera he thought distantly. Every moment of this was being caught on film. The other brothers would probably watch it.

Steve tilted his head away, effectively breaking the kiss. Billy still had Steve's wrists pinned down and was moving all the way out of Steve before slamming back in.

Steve couldn't stop making noises. Whether it was because it felt good, or because it was his only defense against accidentally asking for more, he didn't know. He couldn't be that honest with himself right now.

Billy let one of his hands go and trailed it down over Steve's dick. His hips thrust up into Billy's hand, then back down as Billy drove his cock in. His body was aching all over from exertion and overstimulation.

"S-Sir, please!" He felt tears prickling at the corners of his eyes.

“Yeah, baby, beg me for it, beg me for more,” another sharp slap, this time on Steve’s ass had him releasing a pitiful shout he instantly wished back. “Beg.” Billy said with more intensity, gripping the meat of his ass, hard.

Steve blinked the tears away. “More, please, more!” He groaned, despite his mental protests, eyes slipping shut.

The needy, little *ah, ah, ah’s!* didn’t stop and Steve felt Billy crowd close to him again, knew he was going to get kissed. He bit at his lip to muffle the noises and Billy pulled back. “You’re a good little bitch, aren’t you, Stevie?”

“Good, so good for you, Sir.” It was just mindless babble now. He couldn’t keep his mouth shut.

The thrusts grew erratic and Steve felt how sore he was, knew he’d feel it tomorrow. The thought of sitting down and thinking of Billy Hargrove with every pang of discomfort made an orgasm rip out of him. His shouts were muffled by Billy’s mouth on his again and he felt that it was more intimate than the dick in his ass. Billy continued thrusting, enjoying Steve’s pathetic sounds of desperation for the movement to be over. He had to know Steve was sore at this point.

“God, you’re so good stretched around my dick. Gonna make you suck it next time, fuck that pretty, little mouth of yours wide open.” Billy put his hand on Steve’s face, sticking his thumb in Steve’s mouth and stretching his bottom lip down. *Next time??*

Steve took the initiative and sucked, swirling his tongue around

Billy's thumb and the boy on top spasmed and collapsed on top of Steve, and he could feel the warmth inside him. He felt used and disgusting as Billy caught his breath, his soft dick finally slipping out, but Steve could feel the cum leaking.

Filthy, Steve thought. He needed a shower.

Billy pushed himself up and off of Steve, chest glistening with a sheen of sweat. Steve wasn't fairing much better. He knew he was red all over, not to mention sticky. He could feel the bruises on his hips and thighs that he'd be able to see in the morning.

Billy wiped at his brow, flicking some hair out of his face. He found his jeans and pulled them on, lighting up another cigarette.

Steve sat up, having finally caught his breath. He watched Billy's back as the boy gathered his things, throwing his shirt on but not bothering to button it at all.

Billy sniffed a little and gave Steve a short glance before getting his hand on the doorknob.

"Wait!" Steve reached a hand out, freezing as he realized he was still naked, and covered in cum, not to mention what was leaking onto his sheets. Billy froze, turned, cocked an eyebrow. Steve put his hand down. "I...Sir, I just wanted to know if I--"

"The tape will be reviewed and you'll know by the end of the week,"

Billy said curtly before leaving, a puff of smoke the only trace that Billy had been there at all.

Steve looked down at his mussed sheets and could already feel how much pain he'd be in tomorrow. He needed a shower and a couple Ibuprofen, then a good night's sleep. He decided then and there that he was going to skip his first class in the morning to do his laundry and regain a bit of his dignity. For the night though, he was worn out and too many thoughts were running through his head for him to deal with. He opened his window a little bit to get rid of the stuffy, sex-scented air in his room, and grabbed a towel from his closet, wrapping it around himself before heading out into the hall to the showers.

Fucking Billy Hargrove.

Notes for the Chapter:

Unbetad, mistakes are my own. If you catch any let me know, if you want to beta for me in the future, send me a message.

this idea literally came to me while watching porn?

Veritas Omnia Vincit is Latin for Truth Conquers All and is the real motto of the Triangle Fraternity. I just picked one out of a huge list of frats. I might expand on this? I have some thoughts, what do you think?

2. Where There's A Will

Steve had been dreading Friday. He kept seeing glimpses of Billy around campus, and he'd get flashes of *that* night. Billy's large, rough hands spreading his thighs wider; heated kisses Steve couldn't admit to liking; feeling Billy run a hand down his chest to feel the deep flush that covered him. He kept waking up with wet boxers and a hard-on he couldn't make go away. A sexual-identity crisis in college wasn't unusual, hell, it was downright cliché. He just didn't expect it, he'd never really looked at guys before, never noticed them in the way that he'd noticed girls.

Thursday when he received a call from his high-school sweetheart, Nancy Wheeler, he decided to open up about it.

"Nance, I don't know what the hell is going on in my head." He was exasperated after telling her what had happened.

"Personally I think the whole thing is really fucked up, Steve." She replied and he could hear her pursing her lips, the lines denting her forehead from how worried she was. "Something like that can scar you for life."

"I need this though, Nancy. I didn't have a choice. After my parents told me they weren't going to help me with college...I mean, I have no ties to any of my dad's businesses. I'm in this on my own. I need every opportunity I can get."

"I still can't believe he's not going to help you out with a job, or money for school." She was irritated and he loved her for it.

“Yeah, but like he said, it’s the way his dad did it with him. It’s *the only way you’ll learn, Steve* .” He mimicked his dad’s mundane tone and Nancy snorted.

“You gonna be okay? Want me to come see you?”

“Yeah, kinda, but I’ll be okay. I just needed to talk to someone and say out loud what had happened.” He let out a long breath. “Love you, Nance. Talk later.”

“Talk later.” She hung up.

Steve stared at his phone and knew things were going to be okay, that he was going to be just fine. At least he hoped.

Friday morning rolled around and he woke up to see a black envelope sticking out under his door. He sat upright and was out of bed in a heartbeat. His fingers were shaking as he held the envelope. He gave himself a few moments of anticipation before opening it slowly.

Steve Harrington

Thank you for your interest in the Triangle Fraternity.

Unfortunately you have not been selected to join us this school year.

Please try again next year.

Steve read it three times. He felt an anxiety attack bubbling underneath his skin. How the *fuck* did he not make it? He did everything he was told, he was extremely obedient, he let Billy Hargrove *fuck* him. He was seething. He tore the thick card in half, then again and let the pieces scatter to the floor. He felt tears, *tears* of all things at the corner of his eyes.

“Fuck.” He said aloud. “Fuck!”

The rest of the day he tried to catch Billy to ask him what the actual hell was up with him not getting in, but he couldn't find the asshole anywhere. He didn't want to go to the frat house, he was too humiliated. Throughout his classes, he could barely focus on what his teachers were saying, let alone any of the assignments they were giving out. Deep down, he knew he needed to pay attention, especially now that he didn't have the frat house backing him up.

After his last class, he moped all the way back to his room. He decided he was going to go to the bar not far from campus tonight and get absolutely plastered. He went to unlock his door and was surprised when he found it already opened. He pushed it ajar and was shocked to see Billy lying on his bed, smoking a cigarette, not his first one if the little piles of butts on his nightstand were anything to go by.

“What the fuck, Hargrove?” Steve spat, slamming his door shut. “I’ve been looking for you all fucking day.”

“Damn, Stevie, you got some fire in ya today.” He sat up, crossing his legs on the bed. Steve really didn't like him sitting there.

“Shut the fuck up.” Steve said, dropping his book bag on the floor. “How the hell did you get in here?”

Billy shrugged, “Door’s not hard to pick. You angry about this?” He asked, jerking his head down at the torn-up card.

“Ya think?” Steve snorted. “Look, I really don’t have time for whatever you’re here for, Billy, so if you don’t mind--”

“I was hoping they hadn’t sent the first one.” Billy cut him off. “This is the real one.”

There was another black envelope next to Billy that Steve hadn’t noticed at first. Billy was now holding it out to him casually.

“What d’ya mean, *real one* ?” Steve narrowed his eyes, not trusting Billy in the slightest.

Billy rubbed his face, looked at his pack of smokes like he might light another up. “Look, don’t make me get into it, okay, it doesn’t *matter* . Just read this one and be fucking grateful.”

Steve snatched the envelope out of his hand and ripped it open. He took out an identical, thick card with the same lavish handwriting that had been on the first one.

Steve Harrington

We are pleased to invite you to join the Triangle Fraternity.

Orientation will be Monday, the fifteenth of this month at five pm.

Move-in will be the following Wednesday.

Congratulations and Welcome!

Steve read it three times, like the previous one. He looked at Billy, back at the card, then back at Billy. "I'm gonna need an explanation." He said blankly.

Billy shook his head. "Maybe another time, just know I helped ya out." Billy said. He uncrossed his legs and put them on the ground, his stance wide. "Now then, how about a little *thank you* ." He grinned, glancing pointedly down at his crotch.

Steve gaped at him, blinking rapidly. "Uh. Billy, I don't --"

"I mean, unless you want me to tell them you declined the offer." Billy shrugged, looking up at him almost coyly beneath his astonishingly thick eyelashes.

Steve shook his head, "No, no no no." He said, and it was a surprise to himself when he dropped to his knees in front of Billy, swallowing dryly. He didn't know what to do with his hands, should he take Billy's dick out? Billy could tell he was thinking and unzipped his pants for Steve. "I...I don't really know what I'm doing."

Billy laughed lightly and tapped Steve's forehead. "I figured as much, Stevie. It's kinda hot that I'm your first."

Steve flushed and wouldn't meet his eyes. "It's not like I want to do this." He mumbled.

Billy hummed, "I kinda think you do," he whispered, reaching out and threading his fingers in Steve's hair. "Now go to it, pretty boy."

He pulled Steve's mouth closer and Steve only had another second before he was opening his mouth and letting his tongue tentatively out to lick at Billy's dick. It twitched and he licked again, and again. His hot breath on the dampened skin made Billy harden quickly.

"Put your mouth around it, c'mon." Billy urged, pulling on Steve's hair lightly.

Steve let out a small whimper as he wrapped his lips around Billy's cock. He was frozen for a moment but another hair tug made him suck. He did it again and again, hollowing out his cheeks and moving his mouth up and down Billy's dick.

The boy above was groaning and tugging at Steve's hair. Steve stole a glance up and felt his dick twitch when he realized Billy was staring at him intently.

"Jesus, Stevie." Billy breathed out, "You were fucking born to suck cock, ya know that?"

Steve hummed around Billy's dick and the boy let out a groan, canting his hips up. Steve took as much of Billy as he could into his mouth and realized he needed to do something with his hands. He brought one down to touch Billy's balls, feeling how tight and hot they were in his palm. The grip on his hair tightened.

"Fuck, Harrington." He felt Billy's dick hit the back of his throat. "Oh my god, do you not have a gag reflex?"

Steve let his lips slide back and tightened them a little right before he released the tip with a vulgar sound. "I. I don't know." Steve's voice was raspy.

"Oh my fucking god, do you mind if I...try something?"

"Do I really have the option to say no?" Steve glared at him, ignoring how hard he was in his jeans.

Billy smiled, and it was all teeth. "You're such a good boy, Stevie." Billy chuckled and put his hands back in Steve's hair. "Open." He commanded.

Steve obliged and Billy guided his cock past Steve's plush lips again. He forced it all the way down, till Steve felt Billy's dick at the back of his throat again and Billy let out a sigh, almost of relief it seemed. Billy guided his head up and down, quite quickly. Steve focused on breathing through his nose and ignored how much precum was spilling into his mouth. His hands were on Billy's thighs and he

clenched and unclenched them repeatedly. He knew his palms were sweating. Billy was groaning noisily and Steve suddenly understood *he's fucking my mouth, just liked the bastard wanted* . There was saliva dripping down Billy's cock and Steve was making small noises with the force Billy was thrusting with.

“God, you're so good, so fucking good for me, Ste-eve!” Billy's head tilted back and his grip on Steve's hair tightened hard.

Steve couldn't help it anymore, he reached a hand down and pressed at the bulge in his pants. The pressure made him moan and it vibrated around Billy's cock.

“Shit, baby, I'm so close.” Billy grit his teeth.

Steve reddened further at being called *baby* and remembered that Billy had called him baby while fucking him too. He felt his jaw tightening up, he really couldn't keep this up for much longer.

Turns out he didn't have to. Billy let out a grunt and Steve felt warmth explode in his mouth. Billy held his head there and he didn't have a choice but to swallow, despite his muffled protests. It felt so dirty, so wrong, but Steve felt arousal thrumming through his veins. *Fuck* , he thought, *I'm a fucking pervert* . Billy's grip loosened and his hands slid out of Steve's hair, which Steve was sure was a fucking mess. He popped his mouth off Billy's softening dick and watched the boy fall back onto his bed with a content groan. It was fucking pornographic the way Billy was arching his back.

“Fuck, I want another cigarette.” He muttered.

“Not in here,” Steve wiped at his mouth, his throat feeling raw as he started sputtering, “I-I can’t believe you fucking--”

“I could see your dick, Stevie, I know you liked it.” Billy didn’t raise his head when he spoke, just drummed his fingers on his exposed chest, itching for a smoke.

The blush burning on Steve’s face wouldn’t leave and he wiped at his face with one hand, willing it away. “What do you want from me, Billy?” He asked, getting to his feet, pushing at Billy to scoot over as he sat on his bed. God, the taste in his mouth was vile...but Steve was licking his lips, swallowing over and over to seemingly make it go away faster...he wasn’t sure how true that was.

Billy sniffed and sat up, stealing a glance at Steve. “I already got it.” He said simply before leaning up and catching Steve’s mouth with his own.

Steve froze up for a second before relaxing under Billy’s touch. The mouth on his was warm and he languidly stroked Steve’s tongue with his own. *Good, let him taste it*, Steve thought and moved his tongue with Billy’s. The blonde seemed to enjoy the taste of himself and moaned into Steve’s mouth. Steve moved back, breaking the kiss. Billy had a hand on Steve’s thigh.

“Want me to take care of you?” Billy whispered, nuzzling his head forward into Steve’s chest.

Steve choked up at how sentimental the move was. “No,” he said immediately and almost wished it back.

Billy’s caresses froze and he sat up completely, giving Steve a dark look. “Fine.” He stood, tucking himself back into his pants and zipping it up. “See you at orientation, don’t be late.” His tone was cold and he didn’t look back at Steve when he spoke.

Without another word Billy stormed out of the room, slamming the door with equal force Steve had shown earlier.

The room seemed chilly somehow. Steve reached down, biting his lip as he massaged his dick through his jeans. He couldn’t jerk off right now, couldn’t bring himself to think of Billy, lying back and fucking Steve’s throat, his tight chest rising and falling with labored breathing as Steve sucked him off, how Billy’s moans made him feel accomplished, like he had a bit of power. He groaned and lay back on his bed, forcing his hand to rest beside him, despite the way his body throbbed. He just couldn’t.

Notes for the Chapter:

The Triangle Frat is a real Frat, and the motto from the previous chapter belongs to them. I couldn't bear to name it something else, haha. AUTHENTICITY. Do you want more? I have some ideas, obviously I have some cliffhanger-y stuff in here that could produce another chapter or two. Thoughts?

3. They Didn't Teach This In Boy Scout's

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve's finally got what he wants, but is it enough?
And what's with all the secrets?

Notes for the Chapter:

Where'd all this goddamn plot come from? I swear it was only going to be a one-shot. I've actually got some ideas for another couple of chapters, or more! Let me know your thoughts, every single comment keeps me writing, you're all amazing and wonderful folks for sticking with this story.

I have a beta, my lovely friend Mariah who has been encouraging me and helping along when I get stuck so major props to her!

Here's my inspiration for the frat house: <https://d3imyo1kk0rcam.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/e141a05865a3e3ae170688fe8de538ab.jpg>

Steve was packed on Saturday, with four days until move-in. He was too excited to wait, buzzed from his acceptance all weekend. It made finding his things a little harder and he had to rip open and re-tape a few boxes but it was worth it. He tried his best not to think about Billy but every time he saw the boy he felt something twinge in his stomach, the tips of his fingers would itch. Half of him wanted to say something, but he didn't know what. The other half wanted to duck and avoid him, but he couldn't do it, he couldn't be scared of Billy. Caught in an ongoing battle within his mind, Steve just remained silent and tried to appear aloof.

Sunday rolled into Monday and after his classes Steve had two different outfits laid out on his bed for orientation. He couldn't

decide if he should wear a tie, or just go casual. He looked back and forth between the sets of clothes, and decided he was being utterly ridiculous. He picked a sweater and jeans and took his acceptance card, for proof maybe? Like the guys would open the door and see him standing there and just wave him away with an incredulous “Nooo!” and shut the door in his face? He had been worried he’d get a third envelope correcting the second one’s acceptance of him but no such envelope had appeared.

Steve showed up at the frat house fifteen minutes early and looked at the large, red and brown, brick house with it’s white windows and blue shutters. It was three stories easily, maybe there was even a basement. He knew a lot about the Triangle Fraternity, but he had no idea what the inside of the house looked like. There was ivy growing up the walls outside, nearing the large windows but it was being kept up well. He wondered if they had a gardener, or had to deal with that stuff themselves.

He was so busy staring up at the house he didn’t realize the door was open. Of course Billy was standing there, arms crossed and leaning against the doorframe. He was wearing a t-shirt, which was surprising. Steve couldn’t remember the last time he hadn’t seen Billy’s chest. He gulped, suddenly glad he was far away so Billy couldn’t hear it.

“Well, come on in.” Billy said flatly, turning and disappearing into the house.

Steve padded forward, nerves lighting up as he got closer and closer. He entered and found himself in a proper foyer, with a large painting of the fraternities founder on his left and a small table and mirror to his right. There was a long wooden slab nailed up near the door with a dozen key hooks that were all occupied. A huge, mahogany, double

staircase was in front of him, and there were rooms off to the right and left.

Billy was watching Steve, uncomfortably close to him as they stood in the foyer. "Nervous?" Billy asked. Steve nodded, choosing not to speak. He didn't trust his voice right now. "Good." Billy nodded once and walked forward. "Take your shoes off." He said over his shoulder.

Steve toed out of his shoes and followed Billy to the left. He had been hearing music since walking in and it was coming from the room he was currently standing in. The other newly-chosen pledges were all there, talking in pairs or groups of three. The current members were scattered around the room looking casual and used to this huge mansion they occupied. The ceilings were high, the walls were a rich, creamy white, and Steve was standing on the softest carpet he'd ever felt in his life. Billy walked away from him and went to a table that held a bowl of punch and cups atop a linen tablecloth, not just some cheap piece of plastic like Steve had seen at other parties. He chose to wander around the room, looking at paintings and trying to see if he could slip seamlessly into a conversation.

"Hi," he heard behind him and turned to see Chad, the fraternity leader looking at him with a friendly albeit intense stare.

Steve greeted him and they shook hands. Chad was holding a cup of punch and passed it over to Steve. "You look lost." Chad grinned.

"I kinda feel lost." Steve admitted with a shrug, a bit more honest than he had meant to be.

Chad laughed at that. "You'll get used to it, everyone acts like this the first couple nights. It's like you're living at the Capitol or something. Don't let it intimidate you, you'll be doing laundry and dropping spaghetti on the carpet in no time." Steve grinned at that but Chad quickly continued with a, "No, really though, don't do that." His mouth was set in a serious line but his eyes were teasing. Steve felt more comfortable and was grateful Chad was talking to him.

Chad eyed him for a moment of silence before snapping his fingers, "Oh *Steve* , you're the one Billy won at the auction."

Steve blushed. "Uh...yeah."

Chad nodded, "Right, right. He was pretty adamant about you getting in."

Steve opened his mouth to pry, but Chad winked at him and clapped his hands loudly, "Alright pledges-turned-members, take a seat. Current members, around the couches!" Chad walked away from Steve without another word and everyone was moving suddenly, going where instructed.

Steve sat down next to a guy with thick, short brown hair and large black glasses and busied himself with swirling his punch in its cup. Once everyone was settled, Chad went to stand in front of the wood-burning fireplace and was silent for a moment, looking over the room.

"Boys, today's the day you become men," he began. Steve had to

resist rolling his eyes, “The Triangle Fraternity has been around since 1907 and is one of the most prestigious frats in the whole state. We’re not your typical toga-party-and-kegger type of house. Here, we all work together to make this environment an honest and open one. We all strive for balance and harmony, we get involved with school functions and charities, and always put the brotherhood first. Some of our greatest successors have gone on to run multi-million dollar companies, become world leaders, and even inventors. If this intimidates you, *good*. It should.” Chad looked at each of the pledges individually. “Come up when called and receive your official pin from the Triangle Fraternity.”

Chad called each name aloud and the boys did as told, going over and allowing a pin to be placed on their shirt. Billy was standing with the other members, not conveying any emotion. It was almost weird to see him not looking smarmy or holier-than-thou.

Once all boys were pinned Chad gave them their room assignments and told them to look around, explore the space so that in two days when they moved in they would know what’s what. Steve didn’t want to automatically attach himself to Billy, but he wasn’t as familiar with the other boys. Billy seemed to be waiting for him, lingering near the threshold and jerking his head in a ‘come on’ motion. Steve joined him, rubbing his arm absently. God, why was he always so nervous around this kid?

“I’ll show ya around.” Billy said gruffly and started walking, not bothering to see if Steve was keeping up.

They crossed in front of the staircase and entered the --

“Kitchen,” Billy said, waving a hand around, “All top of the line

appliances, someone does grocery duty every week, keeps it stocked. We do chores in cycles, you'll get your assignments at the beginning of the week, it'll range from cleaning to yard work--" *So, no gardener then* , Steve thought, "--to organizing events and house meetings, you'll get into the swing of it." The kitchen opened up into a dining room, and had a massive table in it with at least fifteen chairs, it was the biggest room Steve had ever seen.

"We have a weekly dinner on Sunday but other than that, you can eat here or in the campus cafeteria, but all frats usually eat in their own houses. We don't throw individual parties, all parties are decided amongst the group and have to be agreed upon. We might be a frat but we take our studying seriously and you're not allowed to go below a 3.5 GPA." That surprised Steve, he knew there was a GPA limit but he didn't know it was that high. That meant Billy was smart. It was impressive to him.

Billy led him from the kitchen to a hallway, doors lining either side. "These are private study rooms, or you can study with the guys in the library," he pointed a thumb at a closed door to his right, "go check it out in your down time, I usually just study in my room. It's cold in there."

Steve wanted to make a crack about Billy buttoning up his shirt once in awhile but coughed a little instead. "Alright, up we go," Billy said, the hall ended in a small staircase that wound up as they went. They passed other guys getting the tour, looking around with excitement and asking questions and Steve wondered if he should be asking questions. Billy would nod at the guys every now and then.

"Here on floor two we have bedrooms and the laundry room, it's communal but there's enough machines for nearly everyone to have a load in at once. It does take quarters, so keep a bag around. Floor

three is more bedrooms and a couple storage rooms with a bunch of random shit, we mostly stay out of them unless we need tables and chairs for parties, things like that.”

The halls were flooded with yellow light from old lamps nailed into the walls. There were individual photos of past members, group photos, sports games, parties, and a myriad of other accoutrement hanging on the walls. Steve was sure he even saw a tacky, Billy Mouth Singing Bass down one of the halls.

“What’s your room number?” Billy asked.

Steve realized he hadn’t even looked at the piece of paper Chad had given him. “Uh...212.”

“Okay, you’re down a floor, let’s go check it out. He gave you the key, right?”

Steve held it up for him to see. They went back down to the second floor and Billy led him to the door, a gold-plated 212 facing back at him.

“Check it out,” Billy told him, gesturing to it.

Steve unlocked the door with a thick, satisfactory click and walked inside. It was large, much larger than his old room. There was a four-post bed and the headboard was *nice* , ornate and carved in an eye-catching fashion. He had a huge closet, a desk, a bookshelf, a dresser,

and to his delight, a flat-screen television mounted on the wall.

“Wow,” he couldn’t hide being impressed. He heard the door close behind him and looked back at Billy who let out a deep sigh, like he was finally safe. “What?” Steve asked.

Billy rubbed his neck, “Nothing, just don’t like being around all the guys at once.”

Steve blinked. “Um...isn’t that the point of a frat? Brotherhood and all that shit?”

Billy snorted. “Yeah, sure.” He didn’t say anything else. “I just need a break for a second.”

He walked closer to Steve who took a step back. Billy paused. “Dude...what is *this* ?” Steve asked, gesturing between the two of them. “I mean, are you...” He trailed off, looking to the side.

Billy ran a tongue over his front teeth, under his lip like he was considering the question. “As far as the guys here know, I’m straight.”

“And are you?” Steve asked, this time looking at Billy, eyebrows raised.

Billy’s lip twitched. “Are you?” He shot back, and for the first time Steve realized: Billy was afraid. He was scared to talk about it,

probably just as scared to admit that he might be, like Steve thought he was.

But he was clearly more active with it than Steve was, he had to be. “When we were together...was that your first time?” Steve asked.

Billy had a light blush on his face, Steve had actually made *him* blush. He felt a burst of warmth in his chest. “No.” Billy said in a small voice.

Steve let out a huff, “Billy, this is *killing* me, I need to know how I ended up in the frat.”

Billy rolled his eyes. “Fine, god you’re annoying. Look, I wouldn’t let them see the video, okay? I just...I wouldn’t. Chad told me if they didn’t get to see it you wouldn’t get in. I told them to fuck off and Chad sent the first envelope without telling me. Later that night I told him I would let *just* him see it in order to get you in. He agreed. It’s not the usual way we go about things but he...” Billy trailed off. “Chad was the one that...initiated...me.”

Wow. “I...I don’t...know what to say to that.”

“Chad knows me better than the other guys. He doesn’t know about me personally, but I think he *knows*. He could tell I was serious about this so he allowed it, and sent the second envelope after seeing the video-proof.”

“So, Chad still saw the video?” It was Steve’s turn to blush.

Billy shook his head a little. “Honestly, I showed him like two minutes of it.”

“And, everyone has to do it?”

“Yes, Steve, everyone gets fucked. You’re not special.” Billy said, sneering at him a little.

Steve acted offended, “Aww, and I thought you actually cared.” He put a hand over his heart, “Now I’m all torn up inside.”

Billy laughed at that, an easy, light sound that Steve hadn’t heard him make before. He smiled a little and Billy cleared his throat, turning back into his sour self. “Yeah, so. That’s how you got in, happy?”

Steve gestured around the room. “I mean, obviously.”

Billy nodded, not smiling. “Good.”

“Do you like it here, Billy?”

“I don’t really have much of a choice to be here.”

Yeah, Billy was a legacy. “What do you mean?” Steve pushed.

Billy gave him a thoughtful look. “Another time, Stevie, hour’s up. Come back in two days for move-in, after classes, whenever you have time. The main office will know about the move so don’t worry about your old room. Just leave your old set of keys on the bed.”

Billy turned and opened the door, leaving Steve to stand there with his thoughts.

*

On Wednesday, Steve moved into the frat house. The living room had it’s couches pushed to the walls and a table full of liquor. As the guys moved their stuff in, they would venture downstairs and join the brothers in drinking and listening to music. Steve bit at his lip and sipped on a bourbon and Coke, watching as Billy picked out music to play. He found it interesting that Billy was in charge of it, but he ranged from what Steve was sure was his own personal taste in rock and roll to more modern and mainstream stuff. Billy kept eyeing Steve like he was looking out for him, and Steve had a sneaking suspicion that he was. Billy had a bottle of Jim Beam sitting dutifully next to him and Steve kept eyeing that, watching as it got more and more empty.

The guys were nice, well, nice enough. A guy named Andrew flat-out stopped talking to him when Steve revealed he was from Hawkins, some kind of uppity asshole aura surrounding him as he clicked his tongue and walked pointedly away from Steve.

Another guy named Ben was clearly in the frat for all the chicks, and talked about football a lot but he was sweet and had a smile Steve bet the girls died over.

There was Caleb, who was quiet and into computers, who kept fiddling with something at the table in the corner, mumbled that it was a foxhole radio, a makeshift radio that was used back in World War II, except those guys had barely nothing to use, just any junked material they could find. Caleb had went out and purchased materials, he wanted to make his own to prove that he could do it. Steve had to admit he was impressed.

Garrett was Chad's second-in-command, he kept making the rounds and refilling people's drinks. It was a little unnerving, like he was making sure everyone was getting good and drunk. Plus he stood easily at 6'4 and had arms like tree trunks. While his stance was intimidating he spoke soft and smooth, and Steve felt like he could trust him despite not knowing him very well.

The night was bleeding into day when the last couple of guys stumbled out of the room, chanting the motto and struggling to get up the stairs. Billy had been gradually lowering the volume and ended with Kim Carnes' *Bette Davis Eyes* . Steve was swaying to the music and smiling, red in the face and full of bourbon and pizza rolls and fancy little sandwiches. He realized they were the last two left.

"You okay, Harrington?" Billy asked from his DJ table.

Steve nodded and it made the room spin. "Yup. Just...definitely drunk."

Billy cracked a smile. “Well, get to bed.”

Why aren't you jumping me? Steve thought. *Why are you acting this way?*

“You’re being weird.” Steve said, squinting and pointing at Billy accusingly.

The other boy gave him a serious look, too serious for the amount of Jim Beam he had gone through. “Steve, go to bed.” The words were crisp, demanding.

“I don’t get you, man. You haven’t- *hic!* -haven’t...tried to tou-”

“Go to *bed* , Steve.” Billy cut him off, fire in his eyes all of the sudden.

Steve was suddenly struck with the epiphany that Billy couldn’t act that way around this house, there could be a brother coming from behind any corner, venturing into the kitchen for a midnight snack.

“Oh, oh! Shhh, shhh, I go it.” Steve held his finger up to his lips and winked at Billy. “I forgot, duh. Stupid Stevie. Thank god for my good looks, huh?” He said with a chuckle, a little too loudly.

Billy had a hand over his eyes, shaking his head. “Go to your fucking room.” He repeated and shut the sound system off. “Now.”

“God, so demanding. You go to *your* room.” Steve stuck his tongue out.

“You’re twelve.” Billy said casually while busying himself with picking up empty cups and wiping off water rings on the table.

“You’re *eleven* .” Steve countered, feeling like it was the sickest burn he’d ever dealt.

“I’m not carrying you to your goddamn room, Steve.” Billy’s eyes were burning, his words venom.

“Fine, fine fine.” Steve waved, as if shoos him and turned, heading toward the stairs. “You’re a confusing person, Hargrove.” He said, needing to have the last word, ones he definitely wouldn’t remember in the morning.

*

His first night in a brand new bed, and Steve couldn’t even remember falling into it when he woke up the next morning. The light was beating in through the window because he hadn’t shut the blinds. His face screwed up and he turned his head over, blocking the shining reminder that he still had class that day. He groaned and told himself he needed to get up, but the warmth of his bed and the waves

crashing through his body from the hangover made him want to stay in for just one...more...minute...

Beep! Beep! Beep!

And of course his cell phone goes off. He reached over and smacked at it but that didn't stop the alarm so he properly blinked and hit *STOP* on his phone. He let his head hit the pillow again and after another few moments he sat up. Bad idea. His head was swimming. He needed water, and food, and coffee -- lots and lots of coffee.

There was a knock at the door.

"No." Steve said quietly before clearing his throat and loudly saying, "Yeah, it's open!"

The door opened and Billy walked in, walking in and tossing Steve a bottle of water. He didn't catch it. It landed next to him on the bed.

"Ohmygod, I could kiss you." Steve mumbled and opened the bottle, greedily sucking at least half of it down.

Billy smiled, a lopsided grin that stretched up one side of his face. "Yeah, well you seemed pretty wrecked last night, figured you'd definitely be paying for it this morning."

"Shut the door." Steve told him.

Billy paused for a second, looking back at it like the door had something to say about this whole thing. Instead of denying Steve, Billy shut it and turned back slowly. "What?" His voice was so small, how had Steve never noticed this part of Billy before?

"C'mere." Steve said, gesturing him forward.

Billy was hesitant but he walked forward eventually and Steve let him take his time. Once Billy was closer, Steve lay back down in the bed. "Join me for a second." Steve told him.

Billy's face was blank. "You're making some awfully bold moves lately, Harrington. What's up with that?"

Steve groaned. "I'm just hungover and want to lay here for a few seconds before having to enter the real world. Just lay down with me, prick." Steve said, not looking at Billy or moving from where he was.

Billy let out a sigh, almost as if he was annoyed and slowly joined Steve in the bed, lying down next to him. Steve rolled over and threw an arm over Billy, pushing his face into the boy's chest. "There, just shush now and let me sleep."

"Steve, we both have class, and you need to get your first round of duties from Chad."

“Fuck Chad.”

“Don’t let him hear you say that, it’s grounds for termination.”

“Pfft, whatever.” Steve said and turned his face, breathing in Billy’s scent.

His hand ran up and down Billy’s chest and it caught a nipple. Billy’s breath hitched in his throat.

“Careful, Steve.” Billy warned.

“Why? Cause you like it?” Steve mumbled. “Why do you always wear that cologne?”

“Huh? Does it smell bad?” Billy asked.

“No, just wondering. It’s...nice.” Steve admitted.

“Ya know, the other day you were keeping space between us and asking me a bunch of questions. Today, I’m in your bed?”

“I’m feeling generous.” Steve said, keeping his eyes shut. “You’re ruining this for me right now.”

He could hear Billy roll his eyes and Steve pinched his nipple. Billy let out a squeak and slapped at Steve's hand. "You're gonna get it, Harrington."

"Oh yeah?" Steve taunted. He felt his stomach flip and realized, that maybe he...wanted it.

With that thought, he held his head up, fixed Billy with a stare, and promptly vomited all over Billy's chest.

4. He Loves Me, He Loves His Cock

Summary for the Chapter:

Sometimes you just need a lil visit from an ex to keep things in perspective.

Steve tries to go a whole week without making any waves. He studies in his room, eats at the campus cafeteria, and does everything humanly possible to avoid Billy Hargrove. It doesn't work as well as he wants it to and it definitely doesn't mean he can avoid the other brothers. They pester him about how he's fitting in, how classes are going, if he has any questions or requests; the only one that springs to mind: leave me the hell alone.

"Don't look at me." Steve had said, scrambling for the bathroom.

Oh yeah, another cool thing about his room, it had a bathroom attached to it. No more communal shitting or showering, Steve was in heaven. It was a basic bathroom; toilet, shower, and sink, nothing fancy like the bedroom--but it was all his.

Steve let the sink run for a minute until the water was hot and ran a washcloth under the stream. He rushed back out to Billy who was lying motionless on the bed, clearly bemused at the situation.

"Oh my god, oh my god," Steve mumbled, hurriedly mopping up the puke. It had fallen down the sides of his chest and was surely soaking into Steve's sheets. Super.

He ran back and forth from the bathroom three times, wringing out the

washcloth and mopping up more vomit before Billy sat up.

“Well-”

“Nope, not a word, don’t look at me, don’t speak.” Steve cut him off, bright red and dizzy as hell. He half-expected himself to vomit again.

“Steve-”

“Uh uh uh.” Steve covered his ears and turned away. “I am mortified and also moving far far away, like China far, so just go burn your shirt and shower and never, ever speak to me about this again.”

Billy laughed, “You’re being ridiculous, it’s not that big of a deal-”

Steve stood firmly where he was, and yeah, he’d heard every word, but he was burning with embarrassment, he wasn’t just going to bounce back from this instantly.

Billy let out a huff and left Steve’s room, leaving the boy to strip his bed and do his first load of laundry at his new house; disgusting sheets covered in vomit and shame.

Steve snapped out of his thoughts, face red at the memory. Why did he have to puke all over Billy, what the fuck were the gods playing at with that bullshit?

He was in the middle of studying about wind energy when there was knock at his door. Defenses down, he yelled “Come in!” and continued taking notes.

The door clicked open and Steve heard a familiar voice, “Stevie, I got your assignment for the week.”

Steve’s back straightened as he whipped his head over to look at Billy shutting the door behind him.

“Oh. Thanks.” Steve quickly looked back at his work, furiously writing. He didn’t turn to look at Billy but Steve could hear the eyeroll the boy was giving him.

“Steve, come on, you’ve got to get over this. It wasn’t that big of a deal.” He sounded annoyed, tired.

“I told you, *never* mention it.” Steve snapped.

“Oookay, then if we’re not talking about it, will you stop being so weird and avoiding me?”

Steve glared over at him, opened his mouth to retort but then closed it again. After regaining some of his composure, he replied, “Just give me my weekly assignment.”

“Damn, you’re so cheerful I’m afraid it’ll rub off on me.” Billy sniped before reading off from a list, “Harrington, grocery duty. It’s pretty easy, the guys will give you their list and some cash. Do it before Wednesday.”

“Fine.” Steve mumbled, pretending to continue to work while he just wrote the word *turbines* over and over.

Billy made an irritated sound, “Steve, seriously, just *look* at me.”

Steve threw down his pencil and it bounced off somewhere. He turned his whole chair and met Billy’s gaze dead-on. “What?”

Billy was quiet for a full five seconds before striding over to Steve in three quick steps, grabbing the back of his neck and bending down to meet his mouth halfway.

Steve’s hands scrambled to push Billy away, to grab at his hair, to scratch at the hand cradling his head, but Billy’s mouth was hot and heavy and insistent and Steve found himself relenting, opening his mouth far quicker than he’d meant to, if he’d meant to.

Billy bit and sucked and kissed Steve until he was a breathless, panting mess. The slick glide of their tongues was making Steve dizzy with every brush and he whimpered against Billy’s mouth. When Billy finally pulled away and saw Steve’s kiss-bitten lips and his red, red face, eyes bright and alert, he moved back in for seconds but Steve quickly stood up and put his hands out.

“ *Billy!* ” He hissed. “Wait.”

“I’m not disgusted by you. I need you to get that.” Billy said lowly, roughly, like Steve wasn’t the only one that had been affected by the kiss.

“How can you not be?” Steve asked.

“I’ve dealt with worse.” Billy shrugged. “A little vomit isn’t going to scare me off.”

Steve looked away, still embarrassed. “Jeez, please don’t remind me.”

“Then stop acting like this. The faster you get over it, the farther away it’ll all seem, okay?”

It was weird, Billy being soft with him. It almost felt intimate. And Steve didn’t really know how to handle that. His eyes wavered over Billy’s frame, up to his dark, dilated pupils. It wasn’t the first time he’d felt it, but there it was again. *He trusted Billy* .

Steve shifted back and forth on his feet and cleared his throat, “Okay, so...did you, um, wanna go back to that thing...you were doing?”

Billy rose his eyebrows and grinned ear-to-ear, “You mean kissing you?” His tone was excited, like he was being offered the ultimate prize.

Steve cleared his throat again and rubbed the back of his neck, suddenly feeling like he was about to be devoured. “I mean...yeah, if you--”

That was all the consent Billy needed before getting Steve back in his hands, grabbing ahold of the front of his shirt and guiding him back till they reached the bed. The moments between when they reached the bed and Steve was lying back, Billy looked like he was ready to pounce, like a predator who’d finally gotten ahold of his prey. His eyes were intense and his movements were sharp, breath coming out in ragged pants, punching out of him like he didn’t know what to expect next. Maybe Steve should’ve been the one panting but he was too transfixed, keeping his eyes on Billy while they moved together. He barely registered falling onto the bed until the only thing occupying his space was Billy, Billy, *Billy* .

“Jesus.” Steve breathed out as Billy’s hands roamed over his chest, running down till they got to the edge of his shirt and lifting it up until Steve sat up a bit to help him remove it. He felt exposed and on edge, like he was on something.

And that something was Billy.

“You’re so fucking...” Billy trailed off, letting out a huff.

“What?” Steve asked, breathless and dizzy as his heart caused havoc in his chest.

“Nothing.” Billy said before kissing Steve forcefully, pushing down to immobilize Steve to the bed.

Steve’s head swam. There was something intoxicating about the way Billy kissed, it *ached* . It was demanding, needy almost. Billy’s hands wrapped around Steve’s wrists and punned them above his head.

“You seem to like holding me down.” Steve mumbled against Billy’s mouth. Their lips were hot, air between them damp. Steve felt tingles spread through his groin. A sharp lick of sweat up his back. He needed to touch Billy.

“You seem to like being held down.” Billy replied, grinding down into Steve with intent, their lips brushing as he spoke.

“Fuck, Billy, fuck, take your shirt off, please.” Steve arched into his movements, loving the friction and the tension in his belly. He wanted it to grow, to consume him. The heat was overwhelming and he knew no matter how much clothing they lost, it wouldn’t subside.

Billy paused for a minute, hands tightening around Steve’s wrists. “God, I really like it when you say please, ya know that?”

Steve shuddered underneath him. “Well, are ya gonna do it?” He was impatient, dying for the contact.

“Say it again.” Billy demanded.

Steve's breath caught, he struggled to swallow. " *Please* ," he hissed quietly.

" Yes ," Billy muttered lowly before releasing Steve's wrists and sitting up, removing his barely-buttoned shirt and tossing it aside.

Steve reached out and touched Billy's torso, the lines of his hips and grooves of his abs. Now that he had Billy so close and so naked, he couldn't keep his hands off him. Billy's skin was hot and smooth, and there was a small patch of hair at the v of his hips where his jeans hung low. Steve had been in this situation before, but he was so on-edge with the circumstances he hadn't gotten to appreciate it. Steve eyed the bulge Billy was sporting and realized that he wanted his lips around it. To his shock, saliva flooded his mouth. Jesus, was his mouth really *watering* at the thought of Billy's dick? Licking and sucking in teasing pulls?

Uh, yeah, it really was. He gripped at Billy's hips hard and the boy above him growled.

"You sure about this, Harrington?" Billy whispered. "Last chance to back out."

Steve eyed him carefully for a few seconds before nodding his head once. "Didn't back out before, did I? Why would I start now?" There was a challenge glint in Steve's eyes, a dare, one he knew Billy would gladly accept.

Mouths melded once again and it was a brutal fight for dominance. Their teeth clicked but it wasn't painful. Steve took a chance and bit Billy's bottom lip, pulling a bit as he tipped his head back. Billy answered it with his own bite, moving his head down to Steve's neck and gnawing at the skin there. Steve let out a moan and arched his hips again, shamelessly rolling them up against Billy's groin as the boy's thighs bracketed his own.

Billy's fingers found one of Steve's nipples and skillfully rolled it between the digits, flicking and pinching as Steve let out soft sighs and whimpers. Steve was so blissed out at the feeling of Billy's body on his that he didn't feel Billy going lower until there was a mouth latching around his nipple. *Shit*, Steve hadn't realized there was direct line from his nipple to his dick. It twitched in anticipation and he got his hands in Billy's hair, tugging gently. In response, Billy bit down a little, enough to pull an absolutely wrecked sound from Steve as he continued moving his hips against Billy's.

"Billy, pants. *Off* ." He demanded.

Billy licked at Steve's nipple and it felt raw, abused. He wiggled under the attention. Billy moved his mouth up to the shell of his ear, pushing against it. "Dunno, I kinda like you like this, all begging and mine to do what I want with. Maybe I'll tease you some more first." Billy's voice wasn't *fair* , all velvety-smooth and vicious at the same time.

The teasing was another thing Steve's dick really liked. It grew impossibly harder and he moaned desperately. "Now, *now!* ." He tried to sound convincing but it came out needy, petulant almost. Steve couldn't believe Billy could pull this out of him, this shameless person who needed to be touched, needed the attention.

Billy sat up, weight going directly to Steve's groin and Steve felt his eyes cross. His hands gripped Billy's hips and he bucked up into the friction again. His hands moved on their own and he found himself undoing Billy's zipper, and yanking at his pants until they were even lower on his hips, till the fat head of Billy's dick jumped out. The boy above him groaned and moved on Steve's lap. His balls were still trapped, and Steve could imagine the tension that was building in them, and how bad Billy must've wanted them free. Fleeting, Steve felt like he held all the power.

A cheshire-cat smile wove its way onto Steve's mouth and his fingers wrapped around what was available for him to grab. Billy's hips moved up, his face red. Steve watched his mouth open, could practically hear the plea on Billy's lips, thought of how nice it would be to finally hear the other boy beg. He loosened his grip and watched Billy bite his lip, watched his eyes fly open and flash an imploring look that Steve felt rush through him.

He took pity, and tightened his grip, letting out a moan that matched Billy's when he felt a throb against his hand.

Then, there was a knock at the door. Steve barely heard it but Billy was off of him in a flash. Steve sat up on his elbows and gave him a dazed look before he heard the second knock.

"Steve?" A muffled voice called from the other side of the door.

"*Shit* ." Billy spat and looked back and forth from Steve to the door, trying to adjust his jeans uselessly.

Another second later he was running very softly into the bathroom, hiding behind the slightly opened door. Steve's head had cleared and he sat up, looking around for his shirt.

A third knock.

“*Fuck* .” Steve grumbled and swung his legs around, moving from his bed to the desk, situating himself so whoever it was couldn't see his boner. He pushed his palm against it and bit his lip at the sensation. He tried to pretend he was focusing on his work. “Come in!”

The door opened and he looked over at Garrett coming into his room. “Hey, Steve, came to give you your weekly assignment.”

Steve wrinkled his nose in confusion. “Oh, uh. Sure.”

“Grocery duty,” Garrett read off his list. “Just ask all the guys what they want, they'll give you cash. If you have any questions let me know.”

“Okay.” Steve said, still confused but choosing not to push it.

“Alright, sorry to interrupt your studying.” Garrett turned to leave but stopped when his foot kicked a shirt on the ground -- Billy's shirt.

Garrett glanced down at it, then saw Steve's shirt a few inches away. Steve's eyes widened but he snapped out of it when Garrett looked back at him. He didn't say anything, just looked from Steve to the bathroom, then continued out of the room, shutting the door behind him.

"What the *fuck* ." Steve's teeth were pressed together while he spoke and he left his chair, going over to the bathroom and saying, "You can come out."

Billy did, and he made a beeline for his shirt. He didn't look at Steve while hastily throwing it on and buttoning it up completely. Steve blinked at him, perplexed.

"Garrett was -- "

"Yeah I heard," Billy cut him off sharply.

Steve winced. "So, were you just...coming to talk? The whole assignment thing was a...ruse?"

Billy sniffed, not meeting Steve's eyes. He reached in his back pocket and took out a cigarette pack, taking one out and putting it between his lips. "Whatever, doesn't matter. I'm leaving."

"Billy, wait, you don't just have to bail, it's not that big of a deal if you want to come see me. You don't have to make shit up."

Billy was *blushing* . Steve felt warmth explode in his chest. “Look, I didn’t *know* Garrett was going to hand out assignments, I thought it was my turn. Just a mistake.”

Steve could see right through the lie, and he was almost irritated. Why couldn’t Billy just be honest with him? Instead of pushing it, he looked to the side and nodded, giving up.

“Okay, well, you still don’t have to leave.”

“Yeah, I do. Need to go figure out my own assignment and shit.” It was an excuse, and this time it kinda hurt.

“Fine.” Steve said, returning to his desk and not sparing Billy another look. “Thanks for stopping by, it was magical as always.” The bitterness in his voice was unmistakable, it had to be.

Billy snorted, a short, annoyed sound that meant he was clearly pissed off too. He didn’t reply though and left the room, slamming the door a bit too hard on his way out.

Steve sat in his chair, not moving for about three minutes while thoughts raced through his head. He was angry, annoyed, sad, confused. He felt totally mixed up and in absolutely no state to study. However, he had a test tomorrow and knew if he didn’t at least try to absorb some information, he would fail for sure. He spent another two minutes sitting there, burning with questions and irritation before he realized he had no idea where his pencil was.

*

Nancy wanted to see him the following week. Having no real excuse to turn her away, and filled with the need to vent to someone, he invited her to come up.

She arrived on a gloomy-looking Saturday morning. Summer was winding down into an early fall, you could smell it in the air. The leaves were on the cusp of change, the air seemed crisp and alive with the impending season. Steve felt out of place in it, yearning for the long days of sunshine and heat. It had nothing to do with certain boys wearing tank tops and opened shirts, exposing tan skin stretched over abs and pecs that he wanted to put his mouth all over.

No. It had nothing to do with that.

“*Steve !*” Nancy was shouting at him from her car window. Oh, she must’ve been talking to him this whole time.

He blinked and focused on her. “Oh, uh. Sorry, Nance. Little distracted.”

“No shit.” Nancy said, biting her tongue from asking a bunch of questions before she even got out of her car. “So, where should I park?”

“Uh, just -- over there.” He gestured towards the guest parking lot and waited until she’d found a spot, getting out of her car and pattering over to him.

“So,” she adjusted the purse on her shoulder, “how’s it going?”

The smile that cracked on Steve’s face wasn’t forced, it just happened. He didn’t mean to do it, there was nothing funny about any of this. It was almost like an involuntary surrender, like he could finally be himself. It was a release.

“It’s...everything’s...c’mon, let’s go, I’ll show you the house.”

He turned and walked, knowing she followed close behind. Nancy was boring her eyes into the back of his head. She knew something was going on.

It’s kinda what Steve loved most about her. No matter what, he couldn’t bullshit Nancy. She always saw right through him.

They approached the house and Steve heard her steps pause. He looked over his shoulder, she was looking up at the house with wide eyes.

“You *live* here?” Nancy asked in awe.

“Yeah, I know. It’s...kind of a lot. You get used to it.”

“Okay, Mr. President.” She snorted.

Steve rolled his eyes but he was grinning while he did it and they proceeded into the house.

“Jesus, I feel like there should be someone coming to take my coat and offering me champagne.” She said, kicking her shoes off.

“Well, you’re not wearing a jacket, but there’s some Coors Light in the fridge if you want one.” He deadpanned, jerking his thumb towards the kitchen.

“Hardy har.” She stuck her tongue out at Steve. “Where is everyone?”

Steve began to lead her upstairs. “Oh, here and there. Probably studying, I think there’s a couple Saturday classes so some of them are probably doing that, there’s a few guys on the football team and one with the student paper. The others are probably just sleeping.”

They reached the second floor as he finished his sentence and Ben (cute smile, total bro) appeared in the hall in nothing but a towel. Nancy faltered a bit, stalling her steps before getting ahold of herself and continuing.

“Whoops, sorry Harrington, didn’t know we’d be having a *special* guest today.” Ben said, saluting Steve with two fingers and leering at

Nancy with a cocky grin. “Left my clothes in the dryer, just running to get ‘em.”

“Don’t worry about it, Ben, just keep the towel secure.” Steve winked. “This is my friend, Nancy.”

They didn’t shake hands but Nancy smiled warmly, saying hello before quickly following Steve down the hall.

“Jesus, Steve, you didn’t tell me I’d have a heart attack if I came here.” She hissed, catching up and following Steve right behind him.

“I didn’t expect it either, Nance. Promise there won’t be anymore surprises.”

“Sure, sure.” Nancy said, clearing not believing him. “How’re you dealing with all of them though? The guys? Since your...” she searched for the word, “revelation.”

Steve tightened a bit. “Um, let’s...talk about that in my room.”

“Oh,” she flushed, “sorry, of course, of course,” and nodded sharply.

They got to Steve’s room and Nancy threw her purse on his bed. “Man, Steve, you really got an upgrade from that shitty little hole you were living in before.”

“I know, and I’ve got...” *Billy to thank* , he didn’t finish his thought. “I really appreciate it.” He finished.

Nancy took a seat on his bed, kicking her feet back and forth and looking around his room before meeting his eyes again. “So really though, tell me, how’re you doing?”

Steve sat at his desk chair and rubbed the back of his neck, eyes focusing on the floor. “Well...things have been good. I think. I don’t know, I’m living it day by day, ya know?”

“And how has...Billy been?” She asked, clearly hesitant about asking about him.

“He’s been pretty hot and cold. It’s pissing me off a little.” Steve admitted. “I never know what he’s thinking. I can’t figure out if he’s just yanking my chain or if he really feels something for me.”

Nancy nodded, eyes glazing over a bit as she thought. “Do you know much about him?”

“Well, I know he’s an Engineer major and has a major affliction towards buttoning his goddamn shirt.”

Nancy cocked an eyebrow at that. Steve let out a frustrated puff, one that rippled his lips as it escaped. “He’s just a friken jerk, kinda.

Sometimes. I don't know, my heads all mixed up when it comes to him."

Nancy bit at her lip. "Well, maybe you should try to find out more about his home life and his past. Maybe there's a reason he's so shut-down emotionally. You're good at that stuff, Steve. I bet you could help him."

"I'm an oblivious moron, Nance." Steve said flatly. "I wouldn't know what he was thinking if he wrote it all out in a love letter and gave it to me."

"You're not a moron, Steve," Nancy said quietly, then after a beat she asked, "did you know you were gay?"

His face pinked a bit. "Well, no. I don't even really know if I am. It's just...he's just... *Billy* ." He finished, cheeks darkening.

Nancy smiled a bit, he could tell she was trying to stop it from becoming a shit-eating grin. "Damn, that was really gay."

He reached over and punched her shoulder lightly, "Shuddup." He looked away from her for a second then back at her. "You hungry?"

Nancy shrugged, "Yeah. I could eat. What were you thinking?"

"Campus cafeteria has some cool stuff, there's some places around here we could go."

“What about your kitchen here? C’mon, Steve, I gotta get the whole experience.”

He let out a sigh as if he was annoyed but conceded and gestured for her to follow. They left his room and wandered through the hall, Nancy eyeing the memorabilia that littered the walls.

Steve kept his tone casual, “Wanna hit up the laundry room after? Find Ben?” He teased, side-eyeing her.

It was Nancy’s turn to blush, “Shush you.” She mumbled, eyes brightening mischievously. “You have to admit though, he’s drop-dead gorgeous.”

Steve looked away, uninterested. “Eh, not really my type.” They were on the main floor, heading towards the kitchen.

“Oh yeah? Then what is your -- ”

She stopped talking as they entered the kitchen.

There, leaning against the island and cutting the skin from a green, granny smith apple with a switchblade, was Billy. *Of fucking course* . Steve thought mentally, gritting his teeth a little. If there was one person Steve had definitely been trying to avoid throughout this whole visit, he was looking right at him.

Billy looked up from his task and paused his actions. His eyes flicked from Steve to Nancy, then back. He was calculating something, but Steve didn't know what.

"Hi!" Nancy said brightly, walking forward and extending her hand. "I'm Nancy Wheeler, Steve's friend." She gave him a quick once-over with her eyes. "Judging by the exposed chest, you must be Billy."

Steve choked on an intake of air and thumped himself on the chest. "*Jesus* , Nance." He felt his face heat up.

Billy eyed her hand, then wearily looked up at her. "*Must* I be?" He hissed, feigning ignorance. "Depends on what you've heard about me, I guess."

"Just that you're Steve's very best friend." Steve didn't have to be looking at her face to hear the shit-eating grin he knew she had this time. She lowered her hand, not snubbed by his reluctance to shake.

"Oh yeah?" Billy cocked an eyebrow at that, tongue running over the edges of his top row of teeth in a quick swipe. "Sounds a little faggy to me."

Nancy was quieted by that comment and after a beat, she cocked her head to the side, examining Billy carefully.

"Steve," she said without looking back at him, "I think you're right, let's go find someplace to eat. Can you go get my purse? I left it in

your room.”

Steve looked at them both, their body language intense and apprehensive of one another. “Uh, sure. Did you wanna come with?”

“Nope, I’ll wait for ya here.” She said crisply, still not looking at Steve.

He had an itch not to leave them together, but Nancy usually got her way, she was persuasive like that so he chose not to fight her on it. He gave Billy a look that clearly meant *Be nice!* Billy only widened his eyes at Steve and waved a hand at him casually.

Reluctantly, Steve left the kitchen and headed to his room. Once alone, Billy felt immediately less comfortable. The posturing he had been doing in front of Steve abandoned his body like a flood being released and he was left cold and vulnerable. Nancy looked him up and down, slowly this time, reproachfully.

“Alright, Wheeler, say whatever is you gotta say, I can see it burning beneath those stunning brown eyes of yours.”

Nancy blinked at him, clearly annoyed. “Look, Hargrove, I don’t know why in god’s name Steve developed feelings for you -- ”

“ *Feelings?* ” He repeated, eyes narrowing.

She either didn't hear him or didn't care because she continued without missing a beat, "-- but that kid is someone I used to love dearly. It might not've worked out with us but I fucking love that twerp and if you hurt him..." her face morphed into a grin that Billy could only describe as murderous, "...there's not a place in this world I won't be able to find you. Don't give me a reason to find you."

Billy paused for a moment before opening his mouth to reply. However, Steve hurried into the room and Billy snapped his jaw shut.

"Got your purse, you ready?" Steve asked, eyes going back and forth between the two of them anxiously.

"Yup, all ready." Nancy said, voice like syrup. She took her purse from Steve and gave Billy one last, lingering look. "See ya around, Billy."

Steve wanted to pry, but Nancy grabbed his arm and pulled him away, chattering about what kind of food she wanted and what she wanted to see when they got back from lunch. The anxiety in Steve's stomach didn't settle the entire time they were out. He kept trying to ask Nancy about what had happened but she would skillfully change the topic or brush his question off. Steve found himself rushing near the end of the meal, wanting to get back to the frat and get Billy in a room alone but Nancy had other plans, asking to see some of his classrooms and the library. Steve knew she'd come a long way to see him and felt it would be rude to shut her down for some guy he barely knew, so he did take her around and answer her questions and make old inside jokes he'd almost forgotten. He reminisced with her about old times and asked how people were back home, about her parents and her brother and his gang of misfit friends.

All the while, he knew he should've felt relaxed, enjoyed Nancy's company, and he did. He just couldn't get rid of the nagging feeling in his stomach, the gut instinct that kept telling him to find Billy. It seemed like that feeling was becoming normal, a habit he couldn't shake off.

Notes for the Chapter:

Happy Sunday!

Sorry about the wait guys. I was having a hell of a time getting this chapter out, and I have real life things causing a delay. I do have a rough outline of what I want the rest of this to look like, so I promise there will be more and I won't abandon it. HOWEVER, feel free to check in or follow me on tumblr: [valkyrie0cain](#) for updates. I'm still shocked at the amount of love this is getting, especially since it should've just been a smutty one-shot.

Hey, do you have ideas for a playlist for this story? I'd love to hear some song ideas to get me in the mood! I'll make a note about your contribution in the future if your song really strikes a chord with me!

Can you draw? I've been dying for some visuals for this and wouldn't say no to any fan art you could possibly dream up! I'd be willing to take any ideas you want to see and incorporate them into a future chapter as a trade-off for some art!

As always, love you guys lots. Y'all are what keeps this fic going!

5. You, Me, and Walter

Summary for the Chapter:

some feelings finally come out, billy goes somewhere he never expected to, and there's a surprise appearance from someone you probably expected.

Steve couldn't find Billy for two days. It was weird, the other boy being the one to avoid him instead of the other way around.

It was also incredibly infuriating.

You'd think it'd be easy, finding another guy you shared a house with, but it wasn't when the place was a low-grade fucking *castle*. He wouldn't answer the door to his room when Steve knocked, so he had no real idea if Billy was even in there. He couldn't catch him in the kitchen or the laundry room, couldn't even seem to find him between classes, and Steve knew where most of Billy's were by now.

It's not like he was stalking him. No, not at all.

On Monday he was in the kitchen, eating chips with homemade dip that Caleb had made for the house, textbooks spread open around him as he prepared for midterms. He liked studying in the kitchen. The guys trickled in and out so it wasn't dead quiet -- which was more distracting to Steve than noise -- and he had a surplus of snacks and drinks he never had to move too far to get. It reminded him of when he studied at home in high school, it felt cozy.

He had to stop himself from consuming the whole bowl of dip so he

begrudgingly saran-wrapped the top and put it back in the fridge, deciding he had been studying long enough and treating himself to a beer. He cracked open a Coors Light and sat back down at the table. The taste of tomatoes, onions and jalapenos from the dip and the beer didn't mix well but he didn't care.

He heard someone walk in and looked up to see Garrett with a list in his hand. "Harrington, there ya are, got your assignment this week. You're on grocery duty."

"Again?" Steve cocked an eyebrow.

"Yeah, the guys agreed you should handle it for awhile, you didn't fuck it up like some of them do."

"How the hell does someone fuck up grocery shopping?" Steve snorted.

Garrett grinned at him, "Well, some guys forget stuff, others buy generic shit and pocket the extra cash, Ben once just ignored the list and brought home liquor and beer."

"Woowow." Steve said, this time both eyebrows went up.

"Yeah, that was a bad week, lots of pizza and take-out. We gave him so much shit for it. Anyway, can you handle it again?"

Steve shrugged, "Yeah, it's not hard. I got it." Garrett nodded and turned away. "Wait! Garrett, you seen Billy? I need some notes from him."

Garrett turned back, stuck his tongue in his cheek for a moment, eyes glinting in a way Steve couldn't describe, "You need some notes from an upperclassman whose not in your major?" His tone was knowing, smug almost.

Steve flushed, tried to cover his embarrassment by taking a sip from his beer.

Garrett continued, "Yeah, he's out hoeing."

Steve choked and sputtered out, "Wh-what?" while wiping his mouth with the sleeve of his Henley.

Garrett seemed to be fighting back a smile. "Gardening duty, kid fights for it every week. Says he likes it. He's probably outside right now."

Garrett left without another word and Steve waited a few moments before getting up and moving his ass to get outside before Billy pulled another Houdini and disappeared. He had a thought right as he got to the front door and raced back to the kitchen, pulling out another beer from the fridge before hightailing it outside.

Sure enough, Billy was there, hoe in hand, swinging it over his head

and then down into the earth to make the dirt more malleable for planting.

“Hey!” Steve said, running down the few steps outside the front door and striding over to where Billy was.

He saw the muscles in Billy’s back tense as he paused his work and Steve was momentarily distracted by the way Billy’s jeans were molded to his ass. Seriously, how did the guy work in jeans so tight?

After a beat, Billy continued working, not looking back. “Sup?” He said in a tone that basically meant *I’m fucking busy* .

Steve snapped out of his thoughts and started talking too fast, “It’s just, I’ve been looking for you for days and it’s like you were wiped off the goddamn planet, seriously, I thought you were expelled or some shit, look I *need* to talk to you, I don’t know what Nancy said to you, but--”

“ *Steve* ,” Billy said sharply, turning and facing him, throwing the hoe aside.

Jesus, the guy was so muscular. It was unfair. He was shirtless, tan skin streaked with dirt and shiny with sweat. Really shiny, like he was oiled up. His collarbones were prominent, the veins on his arms bulging a bit from how hard he’d been working. Steve swallowed roughly. He realized Billy had said something to him because the guy’s eyes were boring into him when he looked up.

“Uh. What?” He said dumbly.

Billy smirked a little, but was clearly still annoyed. “I said, you’re *rambling* .”

“How are you sweating so much?” Steve blurted out.

He had this ethereal glow going on, some of his hair sticking to his face. It was distracting. Steve wanted to reach out and touch him, lick a path from Billy’s neck to his chest and taste the salt and the earth.

Billy wiped at his face, leaving a smear of dirt on his cheek. Steve thought he looked perfect. “Cause I’m *working* . Shit’s not easy.”

“You’re *gardening* .” Steve all but snorted.

“Yeah and it’s not fucking easy work, asshole.” Billy snapped. “Look, did you actually want something? I’m busy.”

Steve tried to get his thoughts back together, but *jesus* , could the guy put a shirt on? He felt cold just looking at him. It’s not like it was the middle of summer anymore. He could feel that his nipples were hard, poking through his shirt, and saw Billy try to casually look down at them before purposefully focusing on Steve’s eyes.

Steve held up the beer, almost like it was an afterthought. “I brought you this.” God, he sounded dumb, like every word that fell out of his

mouth was completely by accident.

Billy didn't reply for a second, the serious gaze never leaving his face, a wrinkle of confusion gathered between Billy's brow, lips slightly pursed. For a hilarious second, he was reminded of Nancy.

Steve felt the silence stretch to an unbearable length and he thought about taking it back before Billy waltzed over to him, hips swaying as he did and plucking the beer from Steve's hand. Their fingers brushed and Steve almost shivered at the contact, of the rough and hot feeling of Billy's skin on his. God, when had he become this screwed?

Billy's eyes never left his as he twisted the cap off and took a long swig. "So, you just came out...to bring me a beer?" He asked once he swallowed.

"Uh," Steve scrambled mentally, "What are you planting?" He asked, forcing the words out. Shit, not what he really meant to go with, but this was all so damn surreal.

Billy clicked his tongue, looked like he was about to tell Steve to fuck off, but just let out a tired sigh and turned towards his work. "Roses in the front, Heather flowers in the back."

This time Steve did snort. "Really?"

Billy gave him an annoyed glare, responded crisply, "Yes, I like it."

“You like gardening.” Steve repeated.

Billy nodded, drinking from the beer again till it was empty before replying, “Yup, even got my own vegetable patch over at the greenhouse that the botanist freaks study in. Use the shit I grow for the Sunday dinners and let the guys take the rest for whatever.” He belched.

Steve thought about the dip he’d been enjoying. “You’re serious?” He could not wrap his mind around it.

“Yes, *Steve* , I fucking *like* it, that alright with you?” Billy spat, thrusting the empty bottle against Steve’s chest, forcing him to take it.

“Sorry...dude, I’m sorry, you just don’t seem like the type, ya know?” Steve rushed to say, not wanting Billy to get pissed at him.

“The guy’s really don’t know shit about lawn care. The grass was always patchy and brown and the ivy on the house was pretty much dust when I moved in. Got sick of looking at that shit so I told them to let me handle it. None of them like doing this stuff so they don’t give a fuck. And it saves me from other shitty duties.”

“So you’ve done it before?” Steve asked.

Billy shrugged, reaching into his front pocket and producing a crushed pack of cigarettes, taping one out and lighting it up. "Yeah, my mom and I used to do it a lot. Guess it stuck."

Now they were getting somewhere. Billy never talked about his parents before, or anything really.

"Your mom?" Steve prompted.

Billy looked from the patch he'd been working on and eyed Steve nervously, like he didn't know whether to proceed or not. He took a sharp inhale on the cigarette, blowing the smoke out purposefully before he continued, "Yeah, before she died. We did this shit all the time."

"Oh," Steve said quietly. He didn't really know what to say to that.

"Don't say you're sorry, I fucking hate that." Billy sneered.

"I wasn't going to." Steve told him. "So...why roses?"

"Doesn't matter," Billy's tone was gruff.

"C'mon man, I'm not gonna laugh." Steve pushed. "You can trust me."

Billy finished his cigarette before replying, nervously bouncing his leg. "We watched Disney movies when I was a kid. Beauty and the Beast was my favorite." Steve could see the faint trace of a blush starting on Billy's features. It was endearing. He hated himself for thinking that.

Steve nodded. "And the Heather flowers?"

Billy swallowed slowly, it worked in his throat. "That was her name," he mumbled so quietly that Steve barely heard him.

But he did.

"Jesus, Billy." Steve breathed out.

He took a small step forward and Billy jerked back, putting a hand out as if to put up a barrier between them. "Don't. Touch me. Not here." He said, the words punching out from him between heavy breaths. His eyes were back to being full of intense threat.

"Sorry." Steve said softly, retracting his hand, using both now to clutch at the beer bottle. "I'm sorry," he said more firmly. Billy shifted his weight back and forth, looked antsy like he wanted to run away. "Look, can I ask you a favor?" Steve asked.

Billy grunted. It wasn't a yes or a no.

"I have to go grocery shopping again. Will you come with me?" Straightforward, and if Billy turned him down, he'd just shrug and walk away. He was done pushing for today.

Billy's hand went to his pocket, touched the pack of cigarettes like he might pull out another one but he didn't. He just turned and walked back over to where he'd been working.

"Sure," he finally said and Steve exhaled silently, "you up for it tomorrow? I gotta get these rose bushes in."

Steve smiled at his back, and it wasn't sarcastic or cynical. He was happy Billy enjoyed something so pure and personal. It made him more human. It was a side of him that Steve could really get used to seeing.

"Yeah, absolutely. Around 10? I got a class at 1." Steve said.

Billy was back to it, hoe in hand but he looked over at Steve with a smile on his face, eyes settled. "Yeah, that's fine. Tomorrow's my free day anyway. Thanks for the beer, Stevie." He said before settling back into his work.

Steve could have stood out there watching Billy for another hour but that would be weird and very obvious so he quickly went back into the house and instead brought all of his textbooks into the large living room with the bay window where he could catch glimpses of the sweaty boy working. Not that he stared a lot, nope. Definitely studying. He definitely didn't have to read the same chapter three times. That would be absurd.

*

Steve was not nervous. It wasn't a date or anything, Billy was just going shopping with him. The night before, Steve had gone room-to-room asking the guys what they wanted from the store. Some gave him lists, others just spouted off things that Steve would quickly write down on a notepad; he'd figured out he needed one after his first time doing this, it was like the guys thought he had some bizarrely amazing memory. They gave him cash, crumpled up or folded, one guy actually handed him a wad with a money clip on it.

"Don't lose that," he'd said, "it's solid gold."

Steve just took the clip off and handed it back to him without a word. Fucking idiot.

Billy was standing at the front door that morning, looking devilishly handsome in a tight, black v-neck, aviator glasses perched on his head, thick leather boots on his feet. Steve felt ridiculous in his too-big hawaiian button-up and slim khakis that cut off at his ankle. He had the overwhelming desire to go change, why the hell hadn't he thought about it before leaving his room? To be honest, he dressed up a lot for class so he mostly stayed comfortable when he wasn't there, and the clothes he was wearing were apart of that.

Now he felt like a child.

Billy had been texting but looked up from his phone in that instant

and Steve's chance to run diminished. Billy looked him over, right down to his Adidas flip-flops and smirked, but it wasn't malicious. He almost looked...charmed?

"Hi." Steve said stupidly, touching his shirt wearily. "Um, thanks for doing this with me."

"Yeah, well..." Billy looked at the ground, "Look at your spindly arms, you won't be able to carry all that shit in one trip. I'm here to help."

"Yup," Steve swayed forward and back on his feet, hands tucked in his pockets, "I need your muscle."

They were flirting, or very very close to it and they both seemed to realize it at the same time.

Steve looked left and right for any sign of the other guys and Billy cleared his throat. "Ready to do this shit?"

Steve held up a plastic bag of notes and cash, humming in agreement.

Once they got to the parking lot, they both started walking separate ways.

Steve paused, "Uh, my car's this way." He called.

Billy held up his keys, swinging them on his finger. "We're taking my baby," he informed without stopping.

Steve ran to catch up with him, flip-flops smacking on the pavement. "What do you drive?" He asked.

Billy slipped his sunglasses on and nodded his head forward. Steve looked.

It was sexy, blue, and looked a little dangerous. It was totally Billy. Like the engineers had taken Billy's personality and built it into a machine.

"Holy shit." Steve said pointedly, melting a bit.

Billy let out a small laugh, "Yeah, she's a beaut. Only thing my dad ever got right." He said, going around to the drivers side.

"What kind of car is it?" Steve asked, finger running over the side. "I don't know shit about cars."

"Chevy Camaro, from the 80s. It was my mom's. Dad wanted to junk it cause he couldn't bear to look at it but I fought him to keep it."

It had California license plates. Steve tried to remember if Billy had ever told him where he was from.

“Wow, how could he even think of getting rid of this thing? It’s hot!” They slid into their seats and the doors shut with a satisfying click.

Billy obviously took care of the car. It was nice inside, despite reeking of cigarette smoke. It also smelled like leather and hairspray. Billy lit up a smoke as he started the car and Steve rolled his window down. The engine roared and Steve’s heart doubled its pace.

“Hot, huh?” Billy mumbled around the cigarette dangling from his mouth.

Steve rolled his eyes but there was no heat to it. “Just drive.” He said, pink tinging his cheeks.

They got to the store quicker than Steve would’ve because Billy was an insane driver. He blared his music, tastes ranging from heavy metal to 80s hair bands to rap that Steve couldn’t even keep up with. He smiled the whole trip though, feeling as if he was getting all these little glimpses into who Billy really was behind the charming mystique and aggressive front he put up. Steve wanted to tuck these snippets away. Something about Billy felt fleeting, like this was all a dream Steve would wake up from and the boy would be gone, would’ve never existed in the first place. Steve tried to keep these thoughts far from his mind and enjoy the moment he was in.

However it was cut short when Billy shut the engine off in the parking lot. Steve let out a sad sigh and Billy gave him a questioning look, one that Steve ignored in favor of getting out of the car.

They got inside the store without talking, Billy took control of the cart and Steve went about separating the cash from the lists, pocketing the money which ended up looking like a ridiculous bulge in his pants. Billy laughed at that and Steve elbowed him while looking down at his lists.

“Should’ve made a master list,” he mumbled, looking over a few of them repeatedly. “I dunno why I didn’t think of that.” He was mostly talking to himself.

Billy dutifully pushed the cart while Steve led, grabbing things and tossing them as they went.

“Christ, every guy wants hot wings, I don’t get it.” Steve said, grabbing six big bags of the things and getting them situated in the cart.

“Men and their meat.” Billy commented flatly, punching a bark of a laugh from Steve, which got him a toothy grin in return.

They got to the bakery and Billy stole a cookie out of the container that said KIDS EAT FREE, ONE A PIECE. He took a bite while Steve watched him, a disapproving-mom look on his face but he was bluffing and Billy could tell, winking at him as he took a second bite.

“Why is it always fucking gingersnap?” He said, some crumbs escaping his mouth.

“Pilfer the kids cookies often?” Steve asked, grabbing a loaf of wheat, white, and for some awful reason -- pumpernickel and putting them in the cart.

“Often enough,” was Billy’s reply.

“Maybe they caught on and put out gingersnap to turn you off.”

“Ain’t never gonna stop me from getting a free cookie, Harrington.” Billy stuck his tongue out at him.

Steve’s stomach fluttered. It was nice seeing Billy so calm, relaxed. At the house, Billy always seemed to be muted, everywhere on campus really. It was like he was always doubting himself, his words and movements. Steve felt a pang of sadness at that but didn’t comment on it.

His thoughts didn’t stop him from noticing Billy throwing two packs of Oreos in the cart and grimacing. “Do you *know* what those things are made of?”

“Oh no, don’t you *dare* ruin Oreos for me, don’t even think about it Steve Harrington.”

And wow, Steve didn’t know Billy saying his full name would make him smile so hard. “Fine, I won’t ruin the magic of Oreos but god only knows how you stay so fit.”

“Oh, so you’ve noticed that?” Billy wiggled his eyebrows at him.

“Shut it you.” Steve said, busying himself by looking at the rows of candy they were in front of.

“You’re one to talk.” Billy said when Steve put a few packs of Twizzlers in the cart.

“They’re for movie night!” Steve protested.

“What movie night?”

“The one I just decided to put on!”

Billy bit at the inside of his cheek, the smile he was giving Steve was sweet and contagious.

“Okay, Harrington.” Billy said decidedly.

“Will you go out with me?” Steve blurted out, without really knowing what he was saying.

They were standing in the middle of the candy aisle, between bags of

mixed treats put out in preparation for Halloween and popcorn balls--which Steve loved--and Billy faltered, hands slipping from the handle of the cart and looking back and forth to check if anyone was around.

"I-I mean," Steve struggled, "Not like go *out* with me, I mean, can I take you out sometime? Not like a date, just like, two guys going somewhere."

Billy was red, like bright friken red, and Steve wanted to punch the air in victory, wanted to call up Nancy in the middle of the store and tell her he'd made Billy Hargrove full-on blush but he didn't, just patiently waited for an answer.

Billy took his time before replying, "Just two dudes going somewhere? Guess I could handle that."

"Totally straight, very hetero."

"Oh my god, *shut up* , Harrington." Billy rolled his eyes but he was still red and Steve wished he could take a picture. "Let's just get out of here, I feel like I've been here for six hours, and you have class." He reminded Steve who swore loudly before taking off for the registers.

They got all the bags out and half went into Billy's trunk, the other half going into the backseat.

"Thanks for coming." Steve said pleasantly once they were sitting

back in the car.

Billy smiled tightly, eyes flicking back and forth through the parking lot.

“What’re you looking for?” Steve asked, glancing around himself.

But then Billy was leaning over to him, getting all up in Steve’s face and Steve understood a second before it happened: Billy was going to kiss him.

His mouth opened just as their lips met, and it was probably the softest kiss they had shared, a bit wet, a bit of heat, and a buzz of warmth traveling down to Steve’s stomach, the sides of his mouth tingling where Billy’s lips were touching his. Steve heard himself whimper and thought it was pathetic before Billy groaned in response.

Steve reached out to grab Billy’s hair, to hang onto *something* but the boy was pulling back, leaving Steve dazed and red.

“I really don’t know what you have against gingersnap.” Steve mumbled hazily.

Billy licked his lips and Steve wanted to lean in and bite at his tongue but Billy was starting up the car, grinning like a moron.

“You explain gingersnap, I’ll explain Oreos.” He said once they started moving.

Steve made a face, “You win.” He said and Billy laughed, turning on the radio and rolling the windows down.

At one point on their way back, Billy stretched his hand over, like he was going to put it on the headrest but instead he threaded his fingers through Steve’s hair, just holding it there, scratching occasionally. Steve almost said something like *I’m not a dog* but the feeling was nice, romantic even, and it was making him break out in goosebumps.

Fuck, this guy was hitting buttons Steve didn’t even know he had.

*

After the shopping trip Steve found any excuse to be around Billy. He needed a running buddy? Billy -- who would wheeze and comment about how he had to quit smoking, Help with an assignment? Billy. Second opinion on his outfit? Totally obvious, and pretty gay but yes, Billy.

And surprisingly the boy seemed happy to indulge him.

Billy didn’t have a problem when Steve lingered, asking him question after question and continuously pushing for answers. All the same, Billy was pretty tight-lipped about revealing much. He would change the subject or counter it with another question. Steve actually began thinking Billy would make a great politician. It didn’t deter Steve

from asking, he just had to be cleve about how he did it.

That usually involved a lot of beer.

On an unseasonably warm day for early fall, Billy found Steve reading in the living room and told him, "Follow me."

Steve did. Billy led him to the kitchen, pulled a six-pack of beer in plastic rings from the fridge and proceeded to lead Steve up the stairs, and up another set, and another. Steve noted Billy had a joint tucked behind his ear.

They ended up in the storage room. They padded around the junk, old photos and stacks of school newspapers advertising successes in the frat, and Billy stood proudly in front of a metal ladder that ended with a closed hatch in the ceiling.

"Uh. The attic?" Steve guessed.

"The roof, dummy." Billy snorted, flicking Steve on the ear.

He rubbed at the afflicted skin. "How do you have access to the roof?"

"Chad let me have the keys, got 'em when I first moved in."

Steve was surprised at how much that irritated him. “Wow, dude must be pretty fond of you.” And yeah, maybe his tone was a little icy.

Billy noticed. “Aww, don’t tell me you’re jealous, Stevie.” And he actually reached out and *pinched* Steve’s cheek,

Brushing his hand away, Steve mumbled, “You’re an ass.”

Billy chortled. “Yeah. Yeah I know.”

He climbed the ladder and Steve cautiously followed him. The metal groaned under their weight but it held and Billy pushed the hatch open.

They climbed out into the sunlight and Steve found himself spellbound at the view. You could see over the entire campus, people milling about, biking, jogging, sitting and studying while it was still relatively nice out. You could see a few streets over as well, just the tops of buildings and upper floors of apartment buildings.

There were two lawn chairs set up, and a coffee can that served as an ashtray.

“Kinda thought you’d be into this.” Billy said, watching Steve look around. He snapped two beers from the plastic rings. “Shotgun?” He asked.

Steve nodded and watched Billy take out his knife, stabbing into a can and handing it to Steve before doing the same to his own. There was something undeniably sexy about watching Billy handle his switchblade.

They popped the tops and slurped at the beer pouring from the slits in the can, watching each other.

Once the beers were drained, Steve managed to just finish his without coughing, they sat down on the lawn chairs and Billy lit up the joint.

For awhile, they just smoked in silence, passing it back and forth.

Steve noticed the silence wasn't as comfortable as it usually was. Maybe it was the pot making him paranoid, but Billy kept looking over at him and biting his lip.

"You gonna say what you have to say?" Steve asked as he passed the joint to Billy.

"Nancy told me." Billy blurted out.

Steve tensed, muscles bunching. His heart rate picked up a bit. "Told you what?"

“Um. Well. That you.” Billy let out a quick breath. “Have feelings for me.”

Billy cracked open a new beer, sipping fast.

“Oh.”

Steve bit at his thumb nail, staring forward without actually seeing anything. The pot had set in and his mind was working slowly, processing too much, overthinking.

“Well,” Billy startled him out of his thoughts, “do you?”

Steve shrugged. “I don’t know. Nancy doesn’t know shit.” Steve said defensively, grabbing for his own beer.

“Oh.” It was Billy’s turn to quiet down.

Panic began leaching through Steve’s veins. It had been the wrong thing to say, but it was the truth. Billy was up and down with him, clearly not out (not that Steve was either), and quite reserved about his past, his parents, and life in general.

He didn’t *know* Billy.

But he wanted to.

“Yes. I do. I mean, if that’s okay with you.” Steve said quietly.

Billy nodded but it wasn’t because he was agreeing to it, he was thinking.

“I...yeah, it’s okay with me.” Billy finally said, and it was a relief to hear that. “But you need to know, I’m not...good with this shit. Feelings and. Stuff.”

“That’s okay.” Steve smiled softly. “So, I’m not just a good fuck to you anymore?” Steve asked.

“Mmm, I don’t know, maybe we should try that part again.” Billy said, eyes lighting up, face setting into a leer. “Think I need a reminder.”

“You forget already?” Steve raised his eyebrows.

“Didn’t forget how you sounded. I really want to see you ride me, see how far down I can get that blush to go.”

Billy reached out and touched Steve’s cheek, running his fingers over the flushed skin.

“Fuck, don’t talk like that if you’re not gonna pay up.” Steve breathed out shakily, letting Billy touch him.

Tingles started spreading down his spine. He let out a small groan.

Billy pulled his hand back, a grin playing on his lips.

“So, tell me where you’re going to take me on this *hetero date* .” Billy said, relaxing back into the chair.

*

That weekend, Steve insisted on driving because after all, “I’m the one that invited you out.”

He finally convinced Billy to leave the Camaro at home and they got into Steve’s BMW, a pretty little ride that Billy grinned in disbelief at. “Shit, Harrington, what kind of life have you had?”

“A pretty lonely one,” Steve told him which prompted silence.

The ride was quiet aside from Billy asking twice if he could smoke in the car, the second time in which Steve caved and rolled the windows down, despite the chill in the air.

Billy wore a tight, white shirt and a denim jacket over it. Steve didn't believe he'd seen anyone pull off denim like Billy could. It just *worked* for him.

"So, where ya taking me?" Billy asked, and he almost sounded nervous. "Hope it's nowhere fancy."

Steve cracked a grin as they sped into town, heading towards the city limit. "Don't worry about it." He said, deciding to leave a little mystery to their destination.

Billy fiddled with the radio and made a crack about the preset channels Steve had set. "*Jazz* , really?"

"It's not all bad."

"Uh-huh." Billy said airily, like it very much *was* all bad.

Steve turned into a parking lot and Billy realized they were at a strip mall. There was a tobacco shop and a Chinese restaurant and a seedy-looking bookstore; a tattoo shop and a pizzeria bookended the place.

"Why're we at some dingy mall? You gonna kill me, Harrington?"

Steve drove around to the back and Billy choked on the smoke he was inhaling.

Chariot , in big red letters, a flashing neon sign. There were a dozen cars parked and judging by the signs posted on the windows with half-naked men Billy quickly assessed that they were at a gay bar.

“What the fuck, why are we *here* ?” Billy asked, looking over at Steve with a snarl, flicking his cigarette out the window.

He looked *mad* , jumpy, like he might hit Steve who put the car in park and rolled up the windows. “I felt like dancing.” He shrugged, opening his door and asking casually, “You coming?”

“The fuck I am!” Billy hissed between clenched teeth.

“Billy, look, no one will know us here. It’s not a big deal.”

“Steve--” Billy started.

He cut him off, “I’ve been here before. No one from campus comes, I promise.”

“You’ve been *here* before.” Billy repeated, still fuming.

Steve nodded slowly, closing the car door and leaning back against his seat. “Yeah, the first time we...when you *fucked* me,” God, it was still hard to say, “I looked up some places and came here. Wanted to

see if I was...gay.”

Billy took all this in and his anger deflated a little. He drummed his fingers on his knee, “And?” He prompted.

“It didn’t suck. Guys bought me drinks. Actually, I got pretty wasted. Definitely shouldn’t have driven back.”

Billy wiped at his mouth, hated the thought of Steve around a bunch of horny dudes, all clamoring to get a shot down his pretty throat, and naive Steve would just babble and smile and dance and not think twice about it.

“You’re so fucking stupid, Harrington.” He breathed.

“HEY!” Steve said defensively.

“I mean, you’re lucky you weren’t roofied. Don’t come here without me again.”

Again . As if there would be a next time. Steve processed that for a moment and nodded. “So, are we doing this?”

“I fucking guess.” Billy still seemed on edge but he got out of the car with Steve and they made their way to the entrance, Billy tense with his hands shoved in his jacket pockets, Steve with his gangly limbs bouncing as he walked.

“Well, look who came back,” a bald, buff man said when they walked through the door.

The bouncer smiled like a shark at Steve.

In response Billy pressed forward, standing right behind Steve, *against* him and glaring at the guy.

“Hey Walter! Yeah, brought a friend this time!” Steve’s voice was cheerful.

The guy, *Walter* , looked over Steve’s shoulder at Billy and his smile remained the same but his eyes flared a bit.

“Looks like ya did. Hope you boys have a fun night.” Walter winked at Steve and Billy let out a low growl, unheard by the pair due to the loud music pouring out from behind a thick, black curtain.

They weren’t carded, just given wristbands and ushered inside. Billy wanted to shoulder-check Walter but resisted. He didn’t want to ruin Steve’s night.

Past the curtain there were awful, red lights glaring down at them from every corner, a fucking disco ball, and fog machines pouring out fumes from the ceiling. It was a long room, like it was the back of all the stores up front, the walls in-between knocked down to make

space. The walls were black and there were huge, box speakers set up all over so that no matter where you were the music was on full-blast.

The bar was at one end, the DJ booth at the other, and men circulated in the middle, dancing and talking (well, yelling over the music) and drinking. There were shirtless guys, a few only in jockstraps, and a couple drag queens circling the room with drink trays of colorful shots.

It was a goddamn eyesore, in Billy's opinion.

Steve, on the other hand, looked exhilarated.

"Drinks?" Steve shouted over the music.

"You have to ask?" Billy responded but Steve was already heading for the bar, veering through the plethora of dancing, sweaty bodies. Billy jogged to catch up, not caring this time if he bumped a few guys on the way.

They didn't seem to care either. He could tell some were high, riding on cocaine or something worse. He stayed close to Steve, feeling like a bodyguard.

"Hello boys!" An attractive man with an eyebrow piercing and a backwards snapback greeted them once they got to the bar.

“Hey Pete, can we have a couple beers?” Steve asked.

“Make mine a double shot, Jim Beam.” Billy leant forward.

Steve gave him a look with a raised eyebrow but Billy ignored him, took out a wad of cash wrapped in a rubber band and put a bill down on the counter, “Keep the tab open.”

Steve reached out and grabbed his wrist. Billy tensed, wanted to hiss, but after a beat he realized it was okay here. Guys could touch each other here. So he didn’t lash out. He still didn’t necessarily feel safe about it though.

“I was gonna buy tonight,” Steve said.

“Forget it, pretty boy, drinks are on me.” Billy replied, taking the shot Pete had poured and holding it up towards Steve. “Salud!”

Steve bumped his beer against Billy’s glass and they hit their drinks to the counter once before Steve took a long sip and Billy slammed his shot.

It burned and his mouth curled up in a grimace but he kept it down, trying to pretend his eyes weren’t watering.

“You’re gonna need something stronger than that, Stevie.” He nodded at the beer. “You need to keep up tonight.”

“I can keep up with you any day of the week.” Steve shot back, a playful smile on his face.

“Ha!” Billy chortled, “you *wish* . Hey Pete!” He flagged down the bartender, “gimme another double, give princess here a single.”

Pete nodded and poured the shots, giving Billy a wink. “I’ll take care of you boys tonight, just keep coming back to me, alright?”

Billy couldn’t tell if he was flirting or just fishing for a good tip. He raised his shot towards Pete in thanks and him and Steve toasted again before slamming the shots.

The second one went down better than the first and Billy licked his lips once it was gone. Steve’s face was screwed up in discomfort and Billy laughed at this.

“You gonna make it?” He asked, shouting and simultaneously hating how loud the music was.

“Absolutely.” Steve shot back, taking another swig from his beer. “Do you dance?” He asked, gesturing with his beer bottle.

“Better than your gangly ass, I’m sure.” Billy liked giving Steve shit,

mostly cause the kid could take it and give it back to him.

Steve took the challenge with a smile and grabbed Billy's hand, dragging him out onto the floor.

The night was a blur of too many shots and grinding, with Billy firmly planting a hand on the chest of anyone that came too close to Steve, with Steve laughing and dancing closer to Billy, his face getting redder and redder with each drink, his eyes glazing over with the liquor and the heat and the fog curling around their bodies.

The red lights really made Steve pretty, and Billy found himself stripping off his jacket, pulling Steve in by the hips so they were touching, rocking together in what could barely constitute dancing but Billy didn't care. He had his hands on the swell of Steve's ass, Steve's hair was brushing his head, their lips were grazing ears and cheeks as they shouted and danced. Billy's shirt was sticking to him in the best way and he could feel the eyes roving over him from all corners of the room. He knew they looked good together.

Billy felt fantastic. He felt alive. It was weird not to worry about getting caught touching Steve like this. It was freeing.

"We gotta get outta here, kid." Billy said a little while later when the night bled into the early hours of the morning.

Steve was grinning like a moron, a permanent expression on his face that he'd been holding for over the last hour.

“Why?” Steve whined, hand running down Billy’s back and boldly grabbing at his ass. “I like it here.”

“Cause you’re drunk and if I have anymore we’ll be calling a cab home.” Billy said. “Also it’s like, one in the morning.”

It was bullshit. They both had the cash to pay for a cab. Steve didn’t seem to realize this though, or if he did he didn’t fight it and jerkily nodded his head in agreement.

“I gotta say goodbye to Pete!” He insisted but Billy had a hand around his wrist and was pulling him towards the door.

“Pete will live, I tipped him well.” He found his jacket balled up on a stool in the corner and grabbed it before leading Steve out the front.

“Walter! Walter, this guy is gonna fuck me!” Steve was saying excitedly as they passed the bouncer.

“Get him home safe!” Walter snorted with a grin.

“Uh, yeah. Thanks.” Billy said, face burning.

“Are you though? Are you gonna fuck me?” Steve asked once they were out in the chilly air.

It was refreshing to breathe something in besides musk and beer breath. Billy gulped it in greedily. “Shut up, Steve,” he finally said and reached over, getting his hands in Steve’s pockets.

“Yes, I knew it!” Steve was giddy, hands clapping together, pushing his hips forward into Billy.

“ *Steve* , I’m just getting your keys, christ.” Billy laughed and managed to get them from Steve’s pocket before the boy got too far.

He knew Steve was hard. They both were. But they were in the middle of a goddamn parking lot behind a shitty strip mall. Billy had enough sense not to go grappling at Steve here.

He just needed to get them back home.

“Oh god, but what if I throw up on you again?” Steve suddenly looked mortified. “Shit, why do I drink? Why do I do that, Billy?” His expression was needy for validation.

Billy rolled his eyes and pushed Steve into the car once the passenger door was open. He quickly strode around and slid into the driver’s seat, turning the car on. That’s when everything went dark.

*

Billy woke with a start. Shit, his head was beating and his body

ached from the exertion the night before. He blinked wearily and looked around.

This was not his room.

He didn't remember driving home last night.

Shit, *Steve* had been with him.

Fuck, he really messed up. He should not have driven. That was fucking *stupid* .

Speaking of Steve, the boy was curled into a ball next to him, snoring. Billy shut his eyes again, willing himself back to sleep.

His stomach had other plans for him though.

He bolted to the bathroom, tripping over shoes and clothes and making it to the toilet before emptying the contents of his stomach into the bowl.

Shit, they must've made pizza when they got home if the sauce he was tasting was anything to go by.

Which meant they had been in the kitchen, probably together, with

Steve all drunk and babbling to god only knows who.

Billy desperately searched his memory for any hint of what had happened.

He did remember driving, a little bit. Steve had been crooning to some sappy love song he refused to switch off, even though Billy had reached for the radio dial a couple of times. He remembered Steve batting his hand away.

He remembered Steve putting his hand on Billy's thigh.

There had been a kiss, a drunken hazy kiss as they unlocked the front door and pushed into the house. Steve had been ahead of Billy but as soon as they got through the threshold Billy had turned Steve around and pushed their mouths together, slotting him up against the wall.

Steve had been all breathy and flushed about it, their tongues meeting immediately and the feel of it made Billy's chest tighten up. He remembered hands tight on his hips, mimicking his own that clutched at Steve.

Then it was a bit of a blur but he remembered turning on the oven and bringing Steve into the living room.

They had been horizontal for sure, still kissing, still noisy. Fuck, someone had to have seen them.

Then it was nothing, everything after that was gone.

“Steve -- “ Billy poked at him. “ *Steven* .” He poked harder.

Steve rolled his head over to look at Billy. “No tickling.” He muttered, voice tacky and thick with confusion.

“Wake up, goof.” Billy said, jostling his shoulder.

“Okay, god, I’m awake. What the fuck?” Steve was grumpy in the morning.

It was kind of adorable.

Then he noticed the huge splotch on Steve’s neck: large, dark, and angry. He was suddenly filled with an overwhelming desire to lean over and sink his teeth into the mark, make Steve tremble underneath him, but there were more pressing issues at hand.

“Are you naked?” Billy asked, too scared to look under the covers. He knew he had boxers on but had no idea what Steve’s situation was.

Steve blinked at him several times, getting more and more aware of his surroundings. “Um,” he peeked under the blanket, “yes, I am naked.”

“Fuck,” Billy paled, felt his stomach go sour, “did we...do you remember if we...” He trailed off.

Steve scrunched up his face, searching his thoughts. “Well, my ass doesn’t hurt.” He mused.

“Oh thank god.”

“You’re that happy about *not* fucking me?” Steve looked disappointed.

“Yeah, just cause I was drunk as hell and so were you. If we...I want to remember it, okay?” Billy admitted.

Oh god, it was so sweet Steve wanted to kiss him, but he knew his breath was rancid, and Billy’s probably was too.

Instead of going for sweet, Steve said, “Ya know, I could’ve fucked *you* .” He stuck his tongue out.

Billy smirked. “Point.” He said, cocking his head at Steve, “maybe someday, if you’re lucky.” He winked, laying his head back down on the pillow in relief.

Steve grimaced, “Ugh, why do we drink?” He asked, wincing at the

headache slowly forming.

“I really don’t know.” Billy mumbled.

Then there was a third voice, one that made the pair jump. “Maybe you’re both compensating for something.”

Billy and Steve both shot up, seeing Garrett standing at the open door to Steve’s room.

When had the door opened?

Billy wanted to throw up again. “How...how long have you been--”

“This isn’t what it--” Steve was rushing to say at the same time.

Garrett held his hand up. “We really need to get on the same page here,” he started. “Put clothes on. Meet me in the kitchen.”

He turned and left, leaving the door open to Billy and Steve’s horror.

Steve scrambled out of bed and shut it, thumping his head forward once it was closed. “Fuck.”

“Yeah,” Billy agreed, “fuck.” He couldn’t even fully enjoy the view of Steve’s plump ass he was getting.

“Maybe, maybe he just thinks we...” Steve trailed off, lost for words.

“Fuck.” Billy repeated.

Steve fiddled with the doorknob, turned to look at Billy. “Well. Do we go down there?”

“I’m fine with dying in this room, thanks.” Billy told him, a bit of terror still occupying his face.

Steve’s face bunched, “We can’t just stay in here. He’s waiting for us.”

“He’ll get bored.” Billy insisted.

That got him an eye roll. “Move your ass, Hargrove. I’m not doing this alone.”

Billy guffawed, looking like a teenager being told to do chores or he wouldn’t get his phone back. “*Fine* .” He conceded.

They dressed quickly and Steve caught his reflection in the mirror of the bathroom. “What the *fuck* , Billy, you gave me a hickey?” He

squeaked.

Billy eyed the red scratches running down Steve's back and decided it wasn't the best time to mention them. He bit the inside of his cheek and tried not to smile. "Yeah, sorry about that."

"Jesus *fuck* , it's like a vacuum tried to eat me." Steve bemoaned and tugged on a sweater, not that it helped hide it in any way. Billy realized it was his, an old and ripped AC/DC sweater he must've grabbed from his room before they ended up in Steve's.

Once decent, they slowly made their way down into the kitchen. They moved quietly, like they were sneaking, like they didn't live in the house.

Garrett was drinking from a steaming mug and *god* , Steve forgot how good coffee could smell after a night of hard drinking. He busied himself with making a cup, holding it out to Billy as if to ask *did you want one too?* Billy shook his head.

Garrett watched the exchange silently, but his face said it all.

There was no one else in the kitchen, thank god, but Garrett still spoke quietly. "I want to start by saying, I obviously know."

" *Obviously ?* " Billy repeated, his tone heavy and dangerous.

“Know what exactly?” Steve asked, sipping his coffee to avoid meeting Garrett’s eyes.

“That the two of you fuck like rabbits, or want to, or whatever the shit level of relationship you’re currently at.”

Billy cleared his throat, shifted from foot to foot then went about making his own cup of coffee, his face tinged red.

It was Steve who spoke first. “Well, I wouldn’t call it a *relationship*,” he said, swirling his cup gently, “Are you going to...tell anyone?”

Garrett waited a beat before replying, “No.”

Billy slammed his coffee cup on the counter and the liquid splashed back at him. He swore loudly at the heat and Steve walked over to him, ripping a paper towel from the roll on the counter and mopping up the coffee, grabbing Billy’s hand where he burned himself and leading him over to the sink.

Billy was still blushing. Steve watched Billy run cold water over his burn for a moment before focusing his attention back to Garrett.

“Why?”

Garrett looked offended. “Cause I don’t give a shit.”

“Do you want something from us?” Steve asked, defenses up.

There was always a catch.

“No.” Garrett said firmly. “Just...be careful. I don’t give a shit, I don’t think a handful of the guys would either. But some of them might cause you problems. If they do, let me know.”

“And what will you do exactly?” Steve asked, watching Billy turn off the water and open and close his hand, staring fixedly at the red skin.

“We’ll go to the Dean. Homophobia isn’t high on his list of tolerant behaviour.”

Steve mulled this over, “So you’d fuck over one of your own brothers...to protect us?”

Garrett shrugged, “My dad’s an alumni, he also contributes heavily to the school. If any of these guys have a problem with you, they can suck it. Go to a community college for all I care.”

Steve wanted to hug him, but he didn’t know how Garrett would react to that.

Billy finally turned and looked at Garrett directly. He was quiet for a

moment and Garrett seemed fine with letting him take his time.

“Thank you.” He said.

Garrett smiled warmly. “Yup, anytime.”

“Were you...in the kitchen last night?” Billy asked, eyes flicking from side to side.

Garrett’s smile turned into a grin. “Maybe. Might’ve helped make the pizza since you two were otherwise occupied.”

“Super.” Billy deadpanned. “Well. Thanks for feeding us.”

Garrett’s attention turned to Steve. “You got a pretty dirty mouth, Harrington. Didn’t think you had that in you.”

And now it was Steve’s turn to blush, from the tips of his ears down to his neck, and further on. “Oh, good. Glad you got to know me that well.”

Billy was sputtering, disbelief on his face, “We weren’t...did we--”

“Oh, you two were all over each other. Luckily no one was around. Caleb came through at one point but I told him you guys were

shitfaced. You also happened to be having some sort of pizza-eating contest at the time so he didn't see anything."

Steve and Billy exhaled in relief at the same time.

"Alright boys, I gotta get to class. Be safe." He winked and left them alone.

Steve and Billy exchanged looks and proceeded to exit the room, mumbling as they went.

"God, we're really fucking lucky. We seriously need to be more careful." Billy said.

"Yeah, it's cool that Garrett doesn't care though. I bet no one really would. I mean, you're not exactly a guy people want to fuck with." Steve told him.

Billy opened his mouth to reply but didn't, eyes wide and glassy staring behind Steve.

He turned.

There was an older man at the door, dressed in a pressed button-down and dress pants. His shoes were shined and his hair was gelled back. He had a mustache and thick eyebrows. He looked stern and professional.

“William.” The man said gruffly, steely eyes set deep in his hollowed face, and he was angry. Steve could tell.

“Dad.” Billy replied lightly, shocked.

Steve could feel the chill between them and gulped, suddenly very aware that he was wearing Billy’s sweater with a big hickey on his neck and they were both disheveled and hungover to pieces.

Fuck .

Notes for the Chapter:

This has been my FAVORITE chapter to write. It's also effing huge but I could not help but let it run.

Gardener! Billy is my favorite headcanon. I am obsessed with this. Let me know what you guys think.

Oh and I made a playlist. It kinda plays into this, but it's also just a list of songs that scream Harringrove to me, of which I have two pages worth. I'll definitely be making more of them.

playlist: <https://8tracks.com/kingdomxoblivionx/wasted-on-me>

tumblr, for updates: valkyrie0cain

every comment encourages me to write more.

this story should wrap up in the next chapter or two, and boy what a ride we have left. oh and sorry for

the lack of sex in the last couple chapters, but i kinda want you guys tearing your hair out by the time we get there. what can i say, i'm a tease.

enjoy! comment! love y'all

6. slow dancing in a burning room

Notes for the Chapter:

BOOM BABY

WOW I bet you all thought I died, amirite?

Well, I didn't, I just did not have internet for an entire month. Once I got it back I realized I still had to write the next damn chapter, so it's taken some time.

I am so INCREDIBLY SORRY for the wait, and I know this chapter isn't my longest but I felt like y'all deserved to know it wasn't abandoned and I hate when people add chapters that are just author's notes, so HERE, have at it and know that there is more to come, with some twists and turns even I didn't see coming until I started writing them out.

Also, for the love of god, it is so difficult to write smut. I want it to be realistic (in the realm of the fanfic world) but I also don't want it to be too short or too long, so I hope it suffices. Let me know what you guys are thinking, your comments and kudos keep me going!

listen to this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IffI4Q7ueA8>

“Dad.” Billy repeated hollowly, the color draining from his face. “What...when did you...” He trailed off..

And suddenly Steve felt like he didn't know Billy at all. The air was palpable, Steve felt suffocated by it, couldn't imagine how it felt to Billy, like a kid being caught out past curfew, a young teen boy discovered for the first time with his hand in his pants, exposed and

wide-eyed, guilty and terrified.

His eyes trailed from Billy's stiff form over to the man glaring back at him. He suddenly was very aware of how close he and Billy were, and how they must've looked. Billy was calculating something, his eyes gave him away. His features were assembling, like Mr. Hargrove had flipped a switch and William Hargrove was returning to his *regularly scheduled programming*.

"I need to, uh...yeah." Steve said, turning and leaving the room quickly. It was very obvious he shouldn't stick around and truth be told, he didn't want to. Something about those steely, grey eyes watching him, deciding things. It was completely unnerving.

He beelined for one of the two small areas under the staircase. It was a sharp corner, leading to a closet on either side. It's where the guys kept their winter gear, coats and skis and such. He stood firm, back against the wood paneling and listened.

"Who was that, William?" Mr. Hargrove's tone was aloof, casual, but under it was a layer of danger. Steve thought of a serial killer making a deal with the police, the same knowing yet mysterious tone, like he already knew the answer, just wanted to hear the words come from Billy's mouth.

"A frie...new kid. Just doesn't know his way around yet." Billy's response was timid, reserved. He was on the defense, expecting the blows being dealt him.

A kid who had clearly been raised with a set wake-up time, well

before school hours started, so he could get chores done before the day even began for most people, the kind of kid who knew how to iron his shirts, who never indulged in Saturday morning cartoons because there were *better things to be done*.

“Huh, really. This far into the term? Must not be very bright.” Steve bristled, shoulders tensing. “Strange too that he didn’t have the sense to introduce himself. I thought the Triangle Fraternity prided itself on molding well-mannered men.”

“Dad, when did you get into town? Why didn’t you call?” Billy was clearly trying to move the topic away from Steve.

He heard movement and silently hoped they weren’t coming to where he was hiding. Billy had to have known he was right there, could hear every word.

“I have to call to see my son? To see what I’m paying for?” The anger was more obvious this time -- bottled, but it was there, pushing at the cork stopper like champagne bubbles shaken up.

Steve realized why Billy acted the way he did sometimes. Growing up in the environment Mr. Hargrove must have provided, it was demanding; a stifling period of hiding oneself and remaining appeasable to authority. Steve would’ve probably ended up a little hotheaded too, wondered how much Billy hated that angry part of himself because it would remind him of his dad.

“No, no of course not, it’s just, I could’ve been in class. Don’t want you to have to wait around for me, ya know?” Billy sounded so

passive, it made Steve's throat tight.

Mr. Hargrove spoke over Billy's last few words, "Was that boy wearing the sweater we bought you?"

We . So there was another woman at home. Steve wondered how Billy felt about her.

"No. It's his. Just a coincidence, sir." Billy responded a little too quickly.

"It had damn well better be." Threatening, icy. "Cause if I find out...so help me god, Billy, if I find out you're disgracing my name here -- you know what'll happen."

Silence. It stretched on for a few heart-pounding moments before Billy responded in a small voice, "I would never do anything to disrespect you, sir."

Another pause, then, "Good. I'm staying at the Hilton. Call me tomorrow when you're free for lunch. We'll discuss your classes and what you're planning for next year. And of course you're expected home over the break to help with the business."

"I'll be there." Billy replied coolly.

"I'll see you tomorrow then." Steve thought they were in the clear

and then, "Oh and Billy? Keep your distance from that boy. Looks like a fag."

Steve's blood went cold, felt like something had stabbed him right in his heart. His tongue felt too big in his mouth and his head went a little fuzzy. Things were snapping into place in front of him like puzzle pieces falling to form one big picture. His eyes darted over the wood paneling like it would reveal some sort of answer, eyes catching the dust particles floating lazily through the air, leading his gaze down where someone had carved the initials S.R & R.E near the bottom trim.

He stayed put until he heard the front door shut. And even then he only barely peeked around the corner to make sure Mr. Hargrove was gone.

He was, but so was Billy. Curling away from his position like a cat ready to pounce, Steve came out from around the corner and walked into the kitchen -- nope. Went across the foyer and looked in the living room -- nope.

"What the hell?" Steve asked aloud.

He turned and jogged up the steps, taking two at a time. Damn this thick carpet and it's muffling qualities. He had no idea where Billy had gone. He made a beeline for Billy's room, and had a passing thought -- he'd never actually been inside. The door was shut and he knocked on it a few times, but got no response. When he tried to open it, he discovered it was locked.

"Fuck, *Billy* !" Steve yelled, exasperated -- that got a response -- loud music suddenly blaring from behind the door.

Fuming, Steve stormed off, back to his room to suffer through his hangover in peace. If Billy wanted a raging headache, what was it to Steve?

God, that asshole.

Once back in his room, he ripped the sweater he was wearing off and shoved it behind his desk -- he didn't want to look at it.

He showered, trying to scrub the hickey from his neck, the smell of sweat and whiskey from his skin, the ghost of Billy's mouth against his. None of it seemed to go away. His back stung under the heat. Once the shower was off he watched the water go down the drain, letting himself bathe in the steam for a few moments longer than necessary.

As the bathroom cooled, he eyed himself in the mirror, toweling his hair and glaring at the hickey that seemed to be laughing at him. He turned and looked over his shoulder, eyes widening at the scratch marks etched into his shoulder blades.

Jesus fuck.

He was angry when he left the house, coffee thermos in hand and a scowl on his face. Why the fuck had he ever thought it would be a

good idea to take Sunday classes?

He barely made it through his Creative Writing class without puking and ended up napping through most of Art History -- fucking mandatory art classes, didn't understand why he needed them when he was majoring in renewable energy, but an Applied Science degree had a laughably long list of class requirements. Luckily the teacher was old, and pretty blind, so she left him alone.

By the time he got to Calculus he had a mind-blowing headache, it throbbed behind his right eye, a constant reminder of his night and the subsequent consequences. A girl he sat next to gave him some Ibuprofen and a sympathetic look and he mumbled his thanks before swallowing them dry, shaking his head at the bottled water she held out for him.

Once he was finally free from classes he got back to the frat house and promptly passed out. It was always the nice thing about being him, even if he were in the middle of a war zone, Steve Harrington could lay right down, curl up his legs and fall asleep in minutes. However his dreams were unforgiving; being chased right off a cliff, cornered by a man with a bat, hunted like an animal through dark woods -- what he at least presumed were woods, who could tell in a dream?

He woke up to a smell, rich and unrelenting, it must've clouded the entire house; garlic and meat and cheese, and for a moment he thought he was at home, his mom downstairs singing softly in broken Italian -- her knowledge of the language had died over the years -- and his dad topping off their wine glasses with something rich and red, something Steve surely couldn't appreciate until he was older.

Then reality hit.

He felt worse than before, like a train had driven right through him and then backed up for seconds. He sat up in bed and wiped at his eyes, amazed he still had his headache. It had weakened a bit, but not enough to ignore.

His stomach rumbled. God, he'd slept till dinner. *Fuck*, the *group* dinner. He had two options, die in the room he was in or trudge downstairs and face seeing Billy.

Ultimately, the food is what pulled him down. He put on a fake smile and piled a plate with lasagna and garlic bread before taking a seat. He was sleep-stained, his face a mess of groove lines from his sheets, eyes clouded, steps a bit wobbled. He had been tuning out the conversations around him, keeping his eyes downcast, but a thump on the back made him start.

"Harrington, you okay?" Garrett and a plate loaded with double what Steve had was sitting next to him.

With a shrug, he replied "Well I'm not bleeding or anything, so, guess it's a good day." Steve poked at his food nonchalantly but the comment made him suddenly aware of the scratches on his back, how they tensed and bunched as his muscles moved.

The guys were laughing and shouting over each other and Steve finally absorbed what was going on around him. Couple of the guys clearly had a buzz going on while the others were eating so fast it made Steve feel sick again. Chad was in the middle of a story,

something about a girl and a whole can of Reddi-Wip.

Billy was nowhere in sight. Steve didn't know if he was relieved or more pissed off.

Garrett wasn't stupid. "He's not here. Hasn't been around all day." He spoke low, giving Steve a half-smile when he shot him a look. It was full of pity and as much as Garrett was growing on him, Steve hated that look.

Steve flicked his eyes away from Garrett apprehensively. "His, uh. His dad showed up. Then he just fucked off." As soon as the words escaped him he wanted to take them back. Maybe he should've kept it to himself.

Garrett shoveled some food in his mouth, drowning the heat with half a glass of milk. He nodded knowingly, "Neil. Fucking asshole if you ask me."

"How do you know so much about all this?" Steve asked. Was Billy close to everyone else besides him?

"It's my job to know. You don't think Chad does all this shit himself, do ya?"

"What else do you know about him?" Steve pushed, eating a forkful of lasagna. Every inch he gained, it felt like a mile. He was fishing for a needle in an ocean, but that ocean was dissipating into a pond,

something dewy and see-through, more things visible to grasp at.

“Chad? Kind of a man-whore.”

“No, Jesus -- ”

“I *know* what you meant,” Garrett interrupted with a playful smile, small and personal, like he was enjoying his joke quite a lot. “He’s got a step-sister, she’s a handful from what I’ve heard. There’s a step-mom, Billy’s not too fond of her though. He just wants to go back to California. And he’s a legacy.”

“What? His dick isn’t that fucking god-like.”

Garrett barked a laugh. “Don’t tell him that. And no, his dad was in the frat. And his grandpa, and probably more of them.”

Steve nodded. “Oh yeah, I did know that.” A pause, then, “Wait, there’s no way. What about the...” He trailed off, too embarrassed to actually say it. “Was initiation the same? Back then?”

Garrett chewed thoughtfully on his garlic bread. “Hmm, more or less. Probably a few differences. I don’t know really, that’s more of Chad’s department. I just dig up dirt on you guys.”

Steve wondered what Garrett knew about him. Before he could ask there was a loud bang that must’ve been the front door, only a few

guys turned their heads and took notice.

A few moments later, Billy strode into the kitchen. He had his arm slung around a girl, a blonde with a barely-there skirt and what Steve assumed was a dishrag wrapped around her tits. Billy was dressed up, looked good in his leather jacket and jeans that sat just above his dick. His hair was clean and wind-blown, shone like a crown surrounding his malicious face. His eyes were half-lidded, hands twitching around Stephanie's shoulder, the other shoved into his pocket. To anyone else, he would've appeared calm, content.

But Steve was *looking* at him, taking in the shift in his step, the way his jaw was set in an unyielding line, then the way he cleared his throat before speaking.

"Guys, guys, meet Stephanie." Billy drawled. "She's...well she's just *fantastic*."

Shit, he was wasted. Steve could smell it from where he was sitting, a pungent odor that cut right through the smell of the food -- attacking Steve personally.

Couple of the guys looked over and said hello before going back to their conversations. Steve felt hot, his face darkened as he met Billy's eyes.

Billy, who was staring right at him, disgust pooled in his eyes. Steve's heart pounded. He could feel it in his ears.

“Don’t bother waiting up.” Billy barked tersely before walking -- well, that was a generous word, it was more like Stephanie was holding him up -- out of the room.

Steve was breathing hard, gripping his fork so hard his fingers were white where they pinched the metal. Garrett was watching him intently, like he was trying to decide something. “Want me to go kick his ass?” He blurted, breaking the silence between them.

Steve barely heard him, but after the words processed he just shook his head.

“Offer stands.”

Steve left his plate at the table and stood in the kitchen for a few minutes at the sink, staring at the faucet drain, hoping somehow it would suck him down; it did not.

He shouldn’t be so mad, he shouldn’t feel so fucking pathetic, like he’d just been stood up at prom.

Jilted, he retired to his room and flopped back onto his bed. His sheets reeked, they needed a wash, but instead of doing something productive, he pulled out his cell phone.

He hit Nancy’s name and pressed call. She answered after two rings.

“What’d he do?” Nancy said, annoyance threaded through her words.

“God, how do you fucking know everything?” He snapped. “What if I was calling to talk about...the weather?”

“Jesus, he really did a number on you, huh?” There was sound in the background, crinkling and shuffling.

“The hell are you doing?” He asked, glaring straight ahead.

“Putting groceries away, you’re on speaker.” She replied.

“Super, so the whole world can hear about my bullshit?”

“Just the cat, but I’ve been sparse on details, so he’s itching for information. Now tell me what he did so I can stop hearing you bitch.”

Steve sighed. “He. Showed up with some girl.”

“Woaaaaow. Fucking asshole, huh? You tell her you suck his dick better than she ever will?” Nancy asked.

“Jesus, Nance. Yeah and then I sucked him off right there in front of all the guys at the table.”

Nancy snorted. "Nothing like good ol' dinner theater."

Steve huffed. "Let's skip to the part where you help me."

"Don't really know what to say, man. You fell for a fuckboy. Happens to us all. Best to get all that out of your system in college."

Steve was quiet for a moment. "That's it? That's what you have to say to me?"

"I don't know, Steve, I got my own shit going on right now -- thanks for asking by the way -- and I can't sit and listen to you whine about this right now."

Jesus. Ouch. That stung a bit.

"You went to a gay bar last night, right? Go back, get some dick. Sounds like you could use it. Shit, bring the dude back to the house, shove it in Billy's face. Give him a taste of his own bullshit."

Steve nodded a little. "Yeah. You're right. Fuck him." He sat up straighter, voice gaining confidence with each word.

"That's the spirit." Nancy said, softer this time. "I gotta go, okay? Go get laid."

Steve hung up and tossed his phone to the side. Then he realized he hadn't actually asked how Nancy was. Shit, he totally owed her.

Was he really gonna go out on a Sunday night when he had class at eight in the morning the next day?

*

"Damn, Steve. You trying to get laid tonight?" Walter asked when Steve walked into *Chariot*.

He was wearing jeans he had packed on accident. They were black, ripped up, and a size too small. His shirt was a white tee, one he planned on discarding as soon as he walked through the door. He wasn't built like Billy, but he knew he had a nice body.

"That's the plan, Walter." He replied with a sigh as he held out his wrist to be banded.

"What happened to that kid?" Walter asked.

"Who the fuck knows?" Steve snapped.

Walter chuckled knowingly and waved him through the curtain.

Steve stalked over to the bar and asked Pete for a double. "Double what, kid?" Pete asked with a cocked eyebrow, wiping out the inside of a beer mug -- like anyone here ever bothered ordering a mug of beer.

"Just whatever. Get me drunk." He shouted over the music.

Pete poured him his shot and Steve told him to keep the tab open.

Anger was the only thing that spurred Steve to down the shot in one gulp. He had never been much of a shot-taker and felt it in his stomach immediately. It was tempted to come back up.

He turned and looked out towards the dance floor. Given that it was a Sunday, it wasn't packed like usual, but there was a decent crowd. Steve eyed his options and found himself watching a blonde, hair buzzed on the sides, short and lean, big lips, swaying to the music and nursing a nearly-empty drink.

He looked back at Pete. "You know that kid?" He asked, jerking his head towards him. "What's he drink?"

Pete shook his head at the first part, then replied, "Know he's stupid enough to drink Long Island's."

"Good, get me one." Steve demanded.

Pete rolled his eyes but made the drink. "Don't be stupid, Steve. Kid's trouble." He slid the drink across the bar, and Steve had a sneaking suspicion it was more Coke than liquor.

"Thanks, Pete, but I'm not paying you for therapy." Steve grumbled and slapped some money on the bar. "Keep 'em coming."

Steve waltzed over to the guy and passed him the drink, plucking the empty cup from his hand and tossing it -- well, fucking somewhere. He had at least three inches on the guy who introduced himself as Dylan and gave Steve a big smile.

Steve didn't even need Pete to keep making drinks, because Steve was able to drag Dylan into the bathroom after only a couple of songs.

"You go to school around here?" Dylan asked as Steve backed him into the stall. He had his hands on Dylan's waist and was biting at his neck. He tasted like salt, the sweat on his body making him smooth and grabby.

Steve pinned him back against the shitty door and broke away from Dylan's neck, moving up and kissing him hard.

"Not a big talker, huh?" Dylan said with a light laugh once they broke for air.

“Just shut the fuck up.” Steve growled.

The music was so loud he could hear it through the walls. Dylan let Steve do what he wanted, let him unzip and get on his knees and suck him off.

Then Dylan turned him around against the door and did the same. Steve let his head hit the door and held Dylan’s head, thrusting his hips forward shallowly into the warm, wet, inviting heat.

Dylan whimpered around his dick and Steve groaned, holding his head still while he fucked Dylan’s mouth roughly.

“God, Bil --” He stopped, gritting his teeth and thrusting harder.

When he came down Dylan’s throat and let his dick slide out of his mouth, the boy stood up and rubbed at his jaw.

“Jesus.” He rasped, voice thick as his throat worked around the word.

“Wanna come back to mine?” Steve asked.

Dylan nodded. “Long as you promise to let me choke on your dick again.”

“Yeah, whatever.” Steve said, pulling his pants up. “Follow.” He instructed and walked out without even checking to make sure Dylan was behind him.

He closed his tab and Pete tried one last time to tell Steve not to do what he was about to do. Steve ignored him. Once outside, he heard the footsteps behind him letting him know he was indeed being followed. They got in the car and Steve drove them back to campus, blaring music the whole time and avoiding answering any questions Dylan threw at him.

He pulled into a parking spot and turned the car off. “Let’s go.”

They got out of the car and started walking towards the house. Before even making it to the steps, the front door opened and Steve paused as Stephanie stumbled out, adjusting her skirt and swearing.

“Woah, hey.” Steve said, holding his hands up and stepping in front of her. “What’s going on?”

Don’t get involved, Don’t get involved! His mind was shouting, but he pushed that little voice to the back of his head.

Stephanie eyed him and sniffled. “Who the fuck are you?”

“I’m -- look, I was at dinner. When you came in with...that guy, ya know.”

She grimaced. "He's a fucking asshole. Kept calling me *Steve* even though I kept telling him to call me Steph, like, what the fuck is that? And he didn't even want to fuck me, just wanted me to blow him and then sit and *talk* . I'm so fucking mad I wasted my night on him. He couldn't even get it up. Guess I shouldn't be surprised after how much fucking whiskey he drank."

Steve nodded absently. "You gonna be okay getting home?"

She rolled her eyes. "Please, I'm the one that drove. Shithead left his car at the bar. He's passed out now."

"Okay, thanks, uh. Stephanie. Sorry about...him."

"Yeah, sure." She said. "I never got your name."

"Uh...it's Johnathan." He lied.

She nodded, thanked him again, and walked off.

Steve felt arms come up and wrap around him as Stephanie grew further and further out of earshot. "So, we doing this?" Dylan whispered in his ear.

He wanted to -- god he wanted to.

“No.” Steve told him coldly. “Get lost.” He walked forward, leaving Dylan yelling at him and probably throwing a couple of fingers in the air. Steve briefly wondered how he was going to get home, but then promptly decided that he didn’t really care. That’s what Uber was for.

Steve didn’t even take his shoes off, just walked straight up to Billy’s room and opened the door.

He wasn’t in sight, but Steve noticed the bathroom door was shut, light coming from underneath and shut the bedroom door behind him quietly. Billy must’ve been faking sleep to get Stephanie to leave..

He looked around. There were posters covering almost every inch of available space, bands and movies -- half-naked women (what bullshit). It darkened the room. The lamps were draped in red cloth, creating a warm glow that washed over everything.

Steve had expected it to be a mess, Billy seemed like the type, but it wasn’t. Dirty clothes were in a hamper in the corner, his desk was neat and organized, there was even a cork board with a calendar pinned to it, important dates circled and a list of what was going on each day tacked next to it. He walked over to it and looked at a photo of Billy and a girl Steve assumed was the step-sister. They were pinching each other’s faces and grinning.

An impressive speaker system sat on a bookshelf, and even more surprising was that there were actual books on it too. Stephen King, Chuck Palahniuk, and to Steve’s utter amusement, a stack of Garfield comics.

He had figurines -- Star Wars and Harry Potter and some that Steve guessed were video game characters but he didn't recognize them.

There was a framed photo on his nightstand, he could tell it was old; a woman in a purple dress with white flowers and thin straps, pregnant and smiling. She looked friendly. She had to have been Billy's mother.

On his bedroom door there was an aluminum sign, one you bought at a discount bookstore, it had a grinning devil painted on it and the words *Devil Brand Coffee! Wake the hell up!* on it.

Steve took his shoes off and sat on Billy's bed. There was a big bottle of Jim Beam open and sitting on the nightstand. He swiped it and took a swig. It didn't even burn going down. He didn't need more liquor, it was a reflex to his surroundings, like not taking a drink would be an insult.

The bathroom door opened and Billy, wearing nothing, walked into the room.

He didn't even notice Steve for a few minutes. Then, stricken and angry --

"What the *fuck*?"

"My thoughts exactly." Steve said, ignoring Billy's dick, trying very hard not to look at his dick, why would he possibly be even interested in --

Shit, he looked.

"Get the fuck out, Harrington."

"Nah, figured it's time for a chat." Steve bit back, taking another drink. "You sure you don't want to call me by my first name? A little birdie told me you've been saying it a lot this evening."

Billy flushed. "Fucking fuck off, I mean it, get the hell out of my room."

"See, here's what I don't get," Steve said, looking up at the ceiling but pointing at Billy with a finger, still holding the bottle by the neck as he did, "you like me, you tell me you like me, then your dad shows up and is a dick, and all of the sudden I don't exist. Explain that."

Billy rubbed a hand over his face, "God, you're such a fucking girl, ya know that?"

"Yes, wanting an explanation is quite feminine of me." Steve deadpanned, eyes betraying him and flicking down to Billy's dick.

Billy didn't reply for a moment, took in Steve's flushed face, then

walked a little closer to the bed, hips swaying as he did. “Ya know, I got better ideas for that mouth of yours,” Billy said, mood going from zero to sixty in point three seconds. He grabbed hold of his dick and started stroking, grinning from ear to ear. “What’d’ya say, pretty boy?”

“Jesus, that’s all I fucking am to you, isn’t it? Just something warm for you to fuck. Why don’t you get one of your girls to do it, Billy. One you can bring home to daddy.”

Steve stood up from the bed, moving to leave, bottle still in hand. “You can’t just distract me with sex.”

Billy scoffed, “You’re just gonna leave with my Beam?”

“Yup, no explanation. Sucks, doesn’t it?” Steve said bitterly.

He had a hand on the knob and then suddenly was yanked back. Steve stumbled, and the bottle was forcefully removed from his hand, set atop the dresser next to them. Billy was in front of him and pushed Steve back, back towards the bed and Steve struggled to gain ground. They grappled for a few minutes, Billy mumbling under his breath and Steve telling him to fuck off. He felt his legs hit the bed. No, no he *couldn’t* be knocked back. He couldn’t let Billy win.

“Fuck you.” Steve growled, but he had nothing to grab at.

Nothing but hot skin, muscle, and the smell of Jim Beam.

Dammit.

“Fuck *you*.” Steve said again, pointedly, putting his hands flat on Billy’s stomach and pushing.

Billy held eye contact, seemingly trying to figure out if Steve was being serious -- or could be persuaded. Steve hated that look, cause at the other end of it was Steve, also waiting to see if he could be persuaded.

“You gonna storm out or you gonna let me get on you?” Billy growled, taking Steve’s wrists in his hands, holding them away, leaning in close, pressing his body against Steve’s. “Distract you with sex?” He parroted Steve’s words back to him.

Steve broke eye contact, turning his head away, trying to steady his rapidly increasing heartbeat.

He could feel the thump where Billy was holding his wrists, but was beginning to wonder if it was only his own he was feeling.

When he didn’t respond, when Billy felt enough time had passed, he let Steve’s wrists go, let his arms fall before putting his hands on Steve’s hips, fingering the edge of his pants.

“Jesus, Stevie, couldn’t find a pair in your size?” Billy teased, getting

a finger under and running his hand over the indent in Steve's skin.

Steve shivered at the contact, could feel his resistance sliding away, desire slowly replacing it, filling in the spaces where sharp, hostile words once sat poised at the tip of his tongue. Billy pushed his body more firmly into Steve's, sinking his teeth into the hickey on Steve's neck.

Steve hissed and grabbed at Billy's hair, tipping his head back and relishing in the feeling. Billy peeled Steve's shirt off and ran his hands over the newly available skin before Steve pulled Billy down on top of him as he fell back onto the bed. It was nothing like when he was with Dylan. It was hot, it was chemical, it was just *Billy* .

"Still too many clothes." Billy grunted, gripping at Steve's hips as he made the mark on Steve's neck bigger.

"Then take them off." Steve instructed and grabbed at Billy's bare ass.

Billy jerked against him and reached down, set to work unbuttoning and unzipping Steve's pants.

That's when he realized he wanted the distraction, wanted to make Billy not want to stop touching him -- ever. Wanted to make sure when they stopped doing this Billy would have the ghost of Steve on his mouth, in his ear, under his body. *When*, not *if*. Billy was not tameable, he would slip out of Steve's hands like sand, then blow away in the wind like he never existed in the first place.

“C’mere.” Steve said, grabbing his face and pulling him in for a kiss. Their tongues met and they kissed open-mouthed, Steve moving against Billy as they did. He felt electric, like every nerve in his body was a live wire, and it was all threatening to short-circuit at any moment. Too many things going off at once.

Billy bit his lip, hard, and pulled away, “God, these *fucking* pants, Steve. Ridiculous.” Billy said, shifting them down only a few inches before they caught.

“Just, just get ‘em off!” Steve whined and ran his hands over Billy’s back, making sure to rake his nails down as they went. It just wasn’t fair that Steve had all these marks while Billy remained pristine.

“Fuck.” Billy said gruffly and removed himself from Steve. “Roll over.”

“But--”

“Steve. Get on your stomach.”

He had this look in his eye, this very mischievous look, and Steve knew it could only mean good things for him.

Panting, he did as he was told, resting on his knees, hips arched up. Billy worked the pants lower and lower, whistled when he realized Steve was going commando, and got them the rest of the way down until they reached his calves. The drag of Billy’s fingers, calloused

and heated made Steve shiver.

“C’mon, get them off.” Steve wiggled his ass impatiently.

“Fuck, I am so glad you didn’t wear underwear.” Billy breathed.

Steve was going to ask what he meant but then Billy was pulling his cheeks apart. He squirmed but couldn’t move much. Hot breath moved over his skin, and Steve clenched.

“Relax.” Billy whispered, waiting till the tension left his thighs and back and leant in, hot tongue moving over his hole.

“Oh my -- *fuck!*” Steve moaned, jerking away from the appendage.

“Don’t move.” Billy’s voice was gravel, aching and needy.

He moved again, sticking his tongue in and moving it. Steve whined, turning his face against the sheets. He felt exposed, vulnerable, like the first night Billy had fucked him. Steve let out a stuttering moan as Billy licked around the rim a bit before moving back in, his tongue soft and flat, licking over and over as Steve fell more undone.

“Billy, the pants,” he insisted but Billy ignored him.

Eventually, he broke, "Please, god, just -- use your fingers, please! You're fucking killing me." Steve begged, trying to shimmy around but having no leverage really with his legs bound. His dick ached between his legs, stiff and hard against his thigh. He wanted to touch it, but Billy's weight bearing down where he held, it was impossible to move without threat of tipping. He couldn't break away from what was happening, it would kill him to pause the sensation.

Heat licked up his spine, his fingers itched to hold onto something. Billy turned his face and bit one of his cheeks. Steve groaned in response.

Then there was a finger edging around his hole, a second later it was pulled away.

"Billy, I swear to god!" Steve yelled, throwing him back a dirty look, about to flip over and jerk himself just to feel some relief.

"Lube, babe, christ." Billy chuckled lowly.

Steve let out an irritated sound, clenched and unclenched his fists. Billy grabbed some stuff from the nightstand.

"How're you so sober right now? You were shit-faced earlier." Steve mumbled, starting to feel a little weird with his ass hanging in the air.

"Smoke and mirrors, Steve. Wasn't that drunk." The bed dipped, Billy

was back behind him. “Fuck, if you could just see how you look right now.”

“How bout you actually do something about it?”

“Yeah, yeah, bossy.”

Steve listened as the lube was uncapped, and then silence for a few minutes. A hand touched him, he jerked a little, but Billy gripped him harder and then there was a finger exactly where he wanted one, putting pressure before pushing in.

“Fuck, please.” Steve hissed between his teeth, pushing back against the digit.

“Slowly, slowly.” Billy cooed and entered Steve at a monumentally annoying pace, not letting Steve control anything, not letting him have what he wanted.

“Billy, if you don’t fuck me properly, I’ll go get the kid that wanted to earlier.”

Billy paused a moment, sneered, then sunk his finger in knuckle-deep. “Yeah? Gonna bring some big bear home to fuck you?”

“Nope,” Steve grunted, pushing back greedily. “Some twink that wanted my dick in his ass. Bet he would’ve been real good too.”

“Shut the fuck up, Steve.” Billy growled and added another finger. This one was added quicker, too quick, and the stretch burned.

Steve moaned, mumbled a quiet ‘yes’ and kept his mouth shut while Billy worked him over, two fingers moving in and out slowly before Billy picked up the pace. Once he was satisfied Billy pulled his fingers out, leant down and kissed the knot of his spine.

“Gonna make you forget all about...”

“Dylan.” Steve supplied.

“Don’t ever fucking say that name again.” Billy said viciously before lining up his dick and pushing in.

Steve trembled, they both knew he hadn’t been opened up enough, but it was that pain, that little jolt of pleasure coming up right behind it, that made Steve’s mouth open, an unforgiving sound falling out. He felt saliva pool then drip onto the pillow. It was only the second time Billy had ever been inside Steve. Billy gripped at Steve’s hips, rubbing his thumb almost affectionately over the swell of Steve’s ass.

Billy pulled Steve back, canted his own forward until he was completely inside. He waited a moment, one that was agonizing for the both of them and then pulled out, slamming back in and making Steve shout.

“Quiet, don’t want anyone to hear you.” Billy warned, smirking as he began fucking Steve roughly, skin slapping, grunting as he did.

Steve needed something -- anything -- needed to be holding something. His hands reached out and gripped at the head board, knuckles white as Billy went harder.

“Oh f-fuck, Billy!” Steve sobbed, each word punctuated by a thrust.

“Gonna have to gag you, aren’t I?” Billy murmured, hitting that spot inside Steve that made him clench, headboard tap tap tapping on the wall.

“I-If anyone sees me walk out of h-here after this, your *fuck*, your covers going to be blown a-anyways.” Steve pointed out, moaning as Billy slapped his ass.

“Are you suggesting a sleepover?” Billy asked, pausing his movement, breath coming out in shaky waves.

Steve squirmed, moved back and forth on Billy’s dick himself, hands falling from the headboard and gripping at the sheets. Billy let out a breathy *fuck* at the move, thumb pulling at Steve’s cheek to watch as Steve’s ass swallowed his dick.

“I’m suggesting that if you don’t fucking continue what you were doing I’ll tie you down and do it myself.”

Billy pistoled into him and Steve melted. "I'd like to see you try." He said, "How's it feel? Not being able to move your legs? Are they falling asleep yet?"

He slowed down, dragging his dick languidly in and out until Steve shook, trying to fuck himself on Billy's dick again but getting nothing as Billy's arms strained to hold him still. The truth was, his legs were falling asleep, the tingles making the pleasure more noticeable.

"Are you going to cum just from this?" He slapped him again, a slow but firm movement that shocked Steve, ripped a shout out of him.

Billy did it again, and again, until Steve was whimpering, ass rosy. He reached over and grabbed the lube, turning it over and dribbling some more over his dick, partly getting it on Steve's ass, and Steve whined at the cool feeling on his heated skin.

"Please, *please*." He begged.

Billy's dick twitched, and for a moment he was terrified he was going to cum but he took a deep breath, tossing the lube aside and moving again, reaching around Steve and getting a hold of his dick.

Steve didn't think he could handle anymore stimulation; the slick of Billy's dick, hard and unrelenting -- *finally* -- as it pushed inside him over and over, the impossible heat of Billy's body on him, nearly suffocating, and now his hand, sliding over the skin in distinct tugs.

“Billy, Billy, *Billy*.” A mantra that didn’t stop, in between words like *please*, *more*, and *harder*.

Steve jerked, clenching around Billy’s dick, shaking while his dick coated the sheets.

He dissolved into a pliant, malleable mound under Billy, letting him fuck him harder and harder, pushing his body so that his head nearly started hitting the headboard until Billy seized, letting out a groan that Steve would be able to recollect on for years to come. There was a slurred sentence, one Steve almost didn’t catch before he felt the pulsing of Billy’s dick in his ass. He had a fleeting thought about condoms and all those safe sex discussions he’d had with his mother, but then they faded away as Billy pulled out of him, rolled over and fell against a pillow.

“*Fuck* .” Billy said after getting some air back into his lungs.

Steve wanted to reply but he only made a dazed, garbled noise in the back of his throat.

He couldn’t feel his legs, needed to get his pants *off* but he was so useless, one arm dangling off the side of the bed, the other uncomfortably pinned underneath him.

“I need a cigarette,” Billy announced, but Steve had a sneaking suspicion it meant *you need to go now*.

Steve's head was turned away from him, seemingly dead to the world but his eyes were snapped open, replaying that sentence Billy had said, that statement, the declaration in the heat of passion. It had to have been a blip. He hadn't really meant it.

Billy, the one who was constantly able to avoid any feeling.

Billy, who wanted to shoot his load and be left alone.

Billy, who had said *I love you* when he came.

*

Steve did not spend the night. Billy stowed away in the bathroom and after ten minutes of dead silence, Steve grabbed his shirt, did up his pants, and took the bottle of Jim Beam with him -- out of spite.

No one was in the hall, Steve didn't even know what time it was, but he didn't care. He currently had no desire to go to go back to his room.

He made his way to the roof, struggled getting up the ladder with his arms and legs feeling like jelly. Once he pushed open the hatch he let the hot evening air wash over him. The days of cool mornings and even cooler nights were over. It was a blow-dryer heat and Steve wished he had stopped at his room to swap his jeans for shorts.

He wasn't alone up there. Chad was sitting on one of the chairs, sipping from a bottle of beer, looking straight up at the sky.

It wasn't like the country where there was a sea of stars winking down at you, but they weren't in the city either so it was a nice enough view.

Chad tilted his head further back, just catching a glimpse of Steve before returning his gaze to the sky.

"Steve, join me."

Spoken as if Steve was disturbing him, but he was allowing the intrusion.

Steve gripped the neck of the bottle tight and sat in the other chair.

They were both quiet, Steve didn't know what they could possibly have to talk about, considered leaving for a moment but Chad was the one who spoke first.

"You liking it here?"

Steve shrugged, then realized Chad wasn't looking at him. "Yeah. It's great. I'm lucky." It was a rehearsed answer, one he'd relayed to his

parents, his friends, old teachers who had checked in on him.

Then, he thought of something, it plopped right into his mind like a stack of newspapers hitting concrete. “Chad, has initiation always been the same? The rituals, the auction, the...fucking.” It was the Beam that gave him the courage, he’d later tell himself.

Chad was quiet, sipped on his beer methodically. Steve wondered if he’d heard him and was about to ask again before Chad opened his mouth.

“Steve, you should probably know something,” Chad started. “First off, Billy should’ve told you a long time ago. God knows I’ve been on his ass about it. He’s not going to be stoked that you heard it from me, but I’m really fickle about honesty.”

A sip. “When Billy was a freshman and I saw his name on the pledge list, I immediately knew who he was. I mean, Neil Hargrove is a legend in the Triangle Fraternity. Meeting Billy was a big deal. He was nervous but mouthy and putting on an obvious front.”

Chad shifted in his seat, set his beer down with a quiet *clink!* before reaching to the other side and grabbing another, popping the top off with a lighter.

Another sip. He belched. “Before I go any further, let me say this: I know he fucked you, and he told me that he informed you that I initiated him, but it wasn’t because it was a rule.”

Steve was staring at Chad, trying to catch everything he was saying. His mind spun.

Another sip. "I wanted Billy from the moment I saw him. He was a feisty thing and it was a conquest for me to get him on his knees." Chad smiled a little. "I enjoyed it."

Steve was holding his breath.

"Have you met Billy's dad?" Chad asked, looking at him out of the corner of his eye, not fully turning to meet Steve's gaze.

"Briefly." Steve murmured, taking a sip from his own bigger bottle.

The liquor soured in his stomach.

"Well, he's obviously a homophobe. Billy broke down freshman year after a visit from his dad and told me everything, about the abuse and how he never wanted to come here in the first place."

Abuse, abuse, abuse. Steve pushed past it, would think about it another time. He needed to hear everything Chad had to say.

"He freaked out, asked how it was possible that his dad would allow a guy to fuck him. So I caved and told him that fucking the pledges is not really apart of the initiation."

Steve blinked, realized he hadn't for awhile and his eyes stung with it. "I'm sorry, what?" It all came out as one word *Imsorrywhat*.

"It's just supposed to be a scare tactic. A humiliating moment we have on camera of the pledges submitting to us, then we back down before anything actually happens. There's no final initiation. We all take a vote on the six that make it in."

Chad looked over at him. "But I know he fucked you. He wouldn't let us see the tape, told me about it later in private so I told everyone that he'd accidentally kept the lens cap on the camera. Luckily, my decision outweighs the group and you were allowed in."

"So Billy...didn't have to..."

Chad shook his head, refocusing on the view in front of them. "I'm guessing it was for the same reasons I had, because he wanted to. Wanted *you*. When I told Billy the truth, he was mad but only for awhile. He felt like he could confide in me after that, and in some fucked up way I think it helped him relax more here."

"Are you gay?" Steve blurted out.

Chad shrugged. "Sometimes," like Steve had asked him if he enjoyed blue cheese on his salad.

That was the only answer he was going to get, Steve could tell. He wiped his free hand over his face, felt his legs scream at him in pain. His blood was boiling, his emotions flip-flopping from anger to pity to resentment. He had so many questions. He needed to know more.

But he needed to hear it from Billy.

“Thanks for the info.” Steve said, and Chad replied but Steve didn’t hear it, just left him alone on the roof with his beer and the bottle of Jim Beam Steve had neglected to bring with him.

It’d simmer in tomorrow’s heat and be undrinkable by the afternoon. If Steve had to guess, he was sure Billy would still drink it if he found it.

He made his way back to his room, thighs quacking, ass throbbing.

Everything in him screamed to go back to Billy, to demand answers but he couldn’t. He was too angry and he’d end up yelling, waking the whole house up. He’d probably even try to throw a couple punches and he wasn’t stupid -- he’d be promptly knocked on his ass.

No, this was something he had to do carefully, had to deactivate like a bomb ticking down in its final seconds.

That was the first time in many years that sleep didn’t just fold Steve up and put it in its pocket. He tossed and turned, body pulsing with every shift, and the clock he had tacked up on the wall seemed to be

mocking him.

Tick! Tick! Tick! Billy! Billy! Billy!

Much later, when his room was starting to turn yellow with the promise of a new day, he finally shut his eyes and lost himself to sleep.

7. i think about you but i don't say it anymore

Billy woke up naked.

His head was *singing*, felt like an airshow was going on inside it, his nose blown out from whatever bottom-barrel cocaine Stephanie had had on her at the time and his bottle of Jim Beam was *gone* . He took note of the time and realized he'd only gotten a few hours sleep. He felt like it too.

The events of the night prior decided to flood in, a dam breaking open -- killing every liveable thing in its path.

Too much.

Not computing.

Go back to sleep .

But he couldn't -- he had class, he had to call his goddamn *father* .

He thought about Steve, it was hard not to since he was evident all over Billy's body. There were dark bruises on his arms he recognized as fingerprints, Billy always marked up easily -- embarrassingly easily. He put his hand on them, pressed his fingertips into the discolored skin and let the ache ground him for a moment.

Getting up from his bed was a chore. He stumbled and caught himself on his dresser, clipping his toe on the corner. He groaned at the pain and tried to breathe, tried not to throw up and get his center of balance back. It was a struggle making it to the bathroom but he did, legs wobbly and arms sore. He collapsed in front of the toilet, opening his mouth and hurling.

He stayed there vomiting until he did nothing but dry-heave, shoulders shaking as he stood.

Staring at himself in the mirror, he called himself an idiot aloud.

Upon further inspection he realized he had red marks on his shoulders where Steve had dragged his fingers repeatedly, not deep enough to break skin -- those marks would be gone by the afternoon.

He was sticky with lube, his dick was limp and pathetic against his thigh, his sheets were crusty but it didn't *matter*.

Steve had been pissed, nothing but fire and big, watery eyes and a pouty mouth that Billy had just wanted to *bite* . Steve had been legitimately angry with him and Billy couldn't *handle* it. The confrontation, the questions. It made his head go fuzzy, made the noise die until all he heard was the thrum of his own heart.

He hadn't showered the night before, just stood in the bathroom with his head pressed against the door until Steve left. Then he'd went back to his bed and passed out cold without a second thought.

Now he had several thoughts, hundreds of them.

God did his head hurt.

He needed to clean up and get his shit together, but contemplated taking a sick day and staying buried in his soiled sheets. The thought was tantalizing.

His phone rang, a particularly daunting tone he'd assigned to one caller. It was his father.

"Of fucking course." Billy growled and walked back into his room to grab it, taking a half-empty bottle of water off his dresser as he passed. He pressed the answer button forcefully, "Yes, dad?" He pretended to be cheerful, sober, not at all dying on the inside.

"William? When are you free today? I want to have lunch with you. Your sister is also here, and Susan. They're both very excited to see you."

What an asshole.

He drained the water bottle, trying to get the vile taste out of his mouth. "I have class until two, I'm free for a couple hours after that, want to meet at Granite City?" It was a fancy restaurant on the edge of town, one that Billy could never afford to go to on his own.

“Sounds wonderful, I’ll see you there. Wear a tie.”

His dad hung up. Rage flooded through him and he whipped his phone aside. The sound was sharp and metallic, definitely resulting in a cracked screen. He didn’t have it in him to care.

He had a sudden thought that made him moan in pain. His car was still at the *fucking bar*.

*

Hours after Billy’s departure to class, Steve woke up in the shower, eyes popping open, jolting as if he’d been startled. He was curled uncomfortably on the tile, water dribbling from the spout that hadn’t been completely shut off. He was soaking wet and his clothes clung to him. His neck sang in pain.

His legs didn’t want to work and his ass *burned* . He winced as he finally got to his feet and left the bathroom, aggressively turning the water off the rest of the way.

It was his free day. He should’ve just stayed in bed, wallowing and questioning and *angry* .

But he didn’t. Couldn’t. It was too pathetic. It would be like *giving in*.

He changed out of his clothes slowly, opting for loose shorts and a tank top. He was still damp and towed his body off before putting them on.

Downstairs he grabbed an apple before leaving the house, needing a walk to clear his head. He felt physically better than he deserved after spending a night almost bent in half. His emotional status, however. That was up for debate.

He meandered around campus, enjoying the hustle and bustle of everyone else's Monday. The sun was high, it was well after noon. For awhile, he sat against a tree -- albeit a little gingerly, watching the theater club's improv group in an open area of grass, eating his apple slowly.

Once they had dispersed he went to a small coffee kiosk and ordered his usual, feeling for the first time like a normal college student who didn't have anything to worry about other than impending finals before summer break. He thought back to before he was in the frat, about how little he had to concern himself with. He thought about calling his father and asking him about his experience, if he'd gone through some similar type of bullshit. Well, maybe not *too* similar. He thought about Billy, didn't want to but it was impossible to avoid. He wondered what class Billy was in, even considered walking by it to see if he could get a peek of him.

He chased that thought away and went to buy a second coffee.

Despite all the shit going on, he went back to the frat house smiling. Outside, a few feet away from the entrance path was their own personal group of mailboxes all thin and crammed together. Steve unlocked his and took out a batch of junk mail, a letter from his

mother, and a thin envelope marked *Immediate Action Required* .

Frowning, he tore it open and unfolded the letter, scanning it quickly.

Steven Harrington,

It has come to the attention of financial aid that your last payment towards your tuition did not go through. We request that you send your next available payment of \$1379.43 to the address below. Cash or electronic payment at the financial aid office is also accepted. If 30 days after this letter has been sent no payment arrives, the debt will become delinquent and your status of student will be negated.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Please call the office at the number listed below if you have any questions.

Steve pulled out his phone and went into his bank app, checking the amount in his savings. It was true, the money left over was laughably small.

When he was a child, his father was firm about Steve making his own way through school. As a teenager, he had two jobs and balanced his GPA well enough to attend college.

His measly savings was matched dollar for dollar by his mother after he graduated high school, unbeknownst to his father, and Steve thought he still had some time under his belt before he had to seriously look into finding a job. The frat had been an additional monthly payment, one Steve hadn't taken into his calculations.

It seemed that his time had dwindled into nothing. He snapped and threw his coffee to the ground. The lid exploded off and what remained of his cooling latte sprayed out onto the ground.

“Steve.”

He jumped. Garrett was next to him, sweating through his shirt, running in place, one headphone in his ear, the other bouncing on his chest.

“God, you have some fucking beacon for me when I’m stressed, I swear.” Steve said, pocketing his phone.

“What’s up?” He asked, not stalling his movements.

“Nothing. *Fuck*. I guess my money for school’s all gone. I’m completely broke.”

Garrett stopped running. He was quiet, thinking. Steve waited.

“Chad’s got some pull, most frats do. He can talk to them, give you more of an extension. We have a distress fund, people are allowed to dip into it for emergencies. We’ll cover you this month.”

Steve held his hands up, “No no no, I’m not a charity case. I can’t -- ”

Garrett cut him off, holding his hand up. “You’re not really in any position to turn this down.”

Steve knew this, but had never been raised to accept handouts. He didn’t say anything because he would try to talk Garrett out of it. He just nodded.

“If you want, I can talk to Chad about it.” Garrett offered.

“No, I can do that. Let me do that.” Steve said immediately.

“Okay.” Garrett said, nodding at Steve before jogging away.

Steve bit at his nails, holding the letter in his other hand as he walked into the house. He sat down at the kitchen table with the letter unfolded in front of him, staring at it. God, he was only in his freshman year. He had three years left and no way to pay for it. He needed a plan, and needed it fast.

Now. Now was the perfect time to spend the rest of the day in bed.

*

Billy stood right inside the entrance of Granite City, adjusting his tie. He hated wearing them. He checked the time on his phone. He still

had three minutes until his family arrived, his father was never late. His headache had finally gone away but he was still sore, had that hazey, post-drunk feeling in his limbs, like he was too big for his body.

He watched elders sip on coffee, the expensive kind in tiny cups, young girls with family money chug down bottomless mimosas, a particularly drab-looking man swirling a tumbler of dark liquor that had to be scotch. He was writing on napkins frivolously with his free hand, going back and forth and adding things, scratching things off, biting at his nails with the pen still in his hand, smudging blue ink around the corners of his mouth.

“Who is that?” Billy touched the elbow of the host, a glossy, young girl with her hair pulled up high and her skirt with a few threads undone -- had to be a college student trying to make good tips. Her shirt was wrinkled and she wasn’t wearing any makeup, but she looked nice.

She was busy looking down at her laminated page of tables, probably trying to work out reservations. She glanced up and looked at who Billy was gesturing to.

“He’s some big writer guy, does sci-fi, I can’t remember his name. Comes in every day and just writes on napkins, never has a notebook. He’s weird but nice.”

Billy nodded, contemplated going over and trying to sneak a peek at what he was working on but the door opened, a heavy click, first to enter was a rush of hot air from the outside, and then his family.

Every button on Neil was done up from his neck to his wrists, pants pressed and tie perfect. Susan was in a cream-colored jacket and skirt, hair wrapped up impeccably. Max, his half-sister, was dressed in black, with shorts and fishnets, her hair was dyed a vibrant red. It had electric orange streaks in it, her eyes heavily makeuiped. He wanted to fist-bump her, scoop her up in a hug at becoming just as rebellious as him -- dressing like it at least.

“Shall we eat?” Neil asked gruffly, no hello, no smile, just straight to it.

Susan ignored him and wrapped Billy up in a hug. He was shocked at her blatant disregard for Neil and wrapped an arm loosely around her. He wasn't used to affection from her, didn't particularly like it from anyone in general, but it felt like a stab in his father's back so he accepted it. Susan broke away and Max was next, burying herself into him and hugging tight. Neil stood tight-lipped, pretending that he was unaware of the snub, waiting for the sentimental moment to be done.

They were brought to their table and water was handed out.

There wasn't any talking until after the food was ordered. Billy always hated eating together, the tension was palpable no matter if they were at home or eating out.

Susan asked all the usual questions about school and the frat and his friends. Max told him about her own schooling and the girls at school she hated and a boy she'd taken a liking to. Neil asked about his plans for next year and reminded him that he was expected home over the summer to help with the hardware store. Billy agreed automatically, a knee-jerk reaction he'd developed over the years.

Susan lightly brought up the possibility of a vacation to California during the summer and Billy perked up at that, but Neil shut it down instantly with a sharp tongue and a firm look. Billy deflated.

The food came and they ate in silence. The only sound was the clink of silverware and the chatter from other tables around them.

Neil excused himself.

Once he was gone, Susan reached over and gripped his hand. "I wanted to tell you in person, I'm leaving your father."

Billy choked on his eggs. "What?" He asked once he'd chugged half his water down.

Susan was wide-eyed, *scared* . "I'm leaving him. I'm taking Max and we're going to California. I only need a little more money. Every time Neil comes home drunk I take what I can get away with from his wallet. I've been doing it for awhile. He...he hit Max."

"What?" Billy all but shouted. He took a deep breath, trying to calm down. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

Max shook her head. Her lip wobbled. She was scared too. Being at college had been a saving grace for the last couple of years, an escape he had been taking for granted. He forgot he had left them with Neil,

and that all of his anger and hostility must've transferred to them.

"Listen, Billy. I can't leave you with him, I can't do that. You've been taking the brunt of his shit for what I assume was long before Max and I came along. And I'm *sorry* I never did anything about it."

He'd never heard Susan swear. Billy couldn't believe what was happening. "I. I don't know what you plan to do. He'll come after me. Us."

"Billy, *listen* , I'm not telling you to come with us. I've got family I've never told him about that I can hide out with. But I can do something for you. I've gotten access to his bank account. I've been moving small amounts over for months. For *you* . It's a nice little getaway sum. All you have to do is call this number and tell them to move it into your account."

Holy shit. Susan was a badass. How had he never seen this?

"Susan, this can't be. Legal. He'll freeze it. He'll take it all back."

She shook her head. "He drinks a lot these days, Billy. I've gotten him to sign forms agreeing to this. The bank can't reverse it once it's been done. The cops wouldn't be able to touch you. And his only defense is being a drunk. They won't go for it."

Neil was coming back. He slipped his hand away from Susan, pocketing the slip of paper she'd handed him. He tried to pay

attention to his food. His mind spun with possibilities, scenarios of Susan being deceptive and underhanded. Neil took his seat and waved down a waiter, ordering a strong drink. Susan pursed her lips. Neil seemed to sense it and glared at her. Billy pushed around his eggs, mixing the hashbrowns and bacon and runny yellow yolk together.

He had a lot to think about.

“So have you been spending anymore time with that kid?” Neil asked, breaking the thick silence.

Billy paused. “Who? Steve?”

“If that’s his name.” The waiter came back with his drink and Neil took a long sip of it.

“He lives in the frat house, dad. I can’t really avoid him.”

Neil slammed a fist on the table. Everyone jumped. This was the thing about Neil’s temper, it just popped up, stemming from nowhere, catching you off-guard.

“You’ll damn well try, you hear me, William? I don’t want to catch you with him, I don’t want to think about it. Fucking degrading my name -- ”

“Neil -- ”

“Shut it, Susan. I’m speaking to *my son*. This has nothing to do with you. Don’t tell me how to parent when your own kid is turning into a mess.”

Susan turned white, mouth opening in shock. Max’s eyes watered. Billy tightened his grip on the knife beside his plate, imagined snapping and plunging it into Neil’s throat, ending everyone’s misery.

His mind was buzzing, the anger in him filling up. He knew a better way to piss him off. He looked right at his father and smiled wide.

“Actually, dad. I see him all the time. We’re close.” There, he’d done it. His pulse picked up, heart in his throat at his admission.

Neil’s eyes bulged. “What?”

“Yup, real buddy-buddy.”

“What is *that* supposed to mean?” Neil hissed.

“I *like* him, dad. And he likes me.”

Neil stood up so fast his legs bumped the table. Everything shook.

Patrons looked over at them.

Neil pointed a finger at Billy. "You listen to me, William. Another word out of your mouth and I'll make you wish you'd never been born."

"In fact, dad, last night he and I -- "

Neil *raged* . "I DIDN'T SEND YOU HERE TO FUCK AROUND WITH SOME BOY! YOUR JOB IS TO GET A DEGREE AND MARRY A GIRL I APPROVE OF AND PROVIDE FOR YOUR FAMILY! YOUR MOTHER WOULD BE SO GODDAMN DISGUSTED IN YOU!"

Billy was on his feet now, blood boiling. Susan and Max sat with their hands gripping the seat of their chairs, eyes wide and unmoving.

"NO SHE WOULDN'T DAD, CAUSE SHE FUCKING KNEW ABOUT IT!"

Neil was quiet for a second. Billy could see the staff in his peripherals, moving in on them.

"What did you just say?" Neil asked crisply.

Billy hadn't lost any steam. "SHE FUCKING KNEW! I TOLD HER WHEN I WAS SIX. AND SHE SAID SHE STILL LOVED ME!"

Neil's hands were balled into fists. His face was red, veins in neck popping. "You told her?" A breath, ragged and shaky. "You told her. And then she fucking died, didn't she? You killed your fucking mother with your abominable confession."

Billy rounded the table, made moves as if he was leaving, but stopped short in front of his dad and swung at him. He had never done that before. Neil wasn't expecting it. His fist made contact with his dad's face and he didn't wait around to see Neil stumble back, almost fall and catch himself on the table. Billy moved swiftly, ripping the tie off and throwing it over his shoulder before he got out the door.

He was so *done*.

*

Billy felt high. He needed to find Steve and apologize. He needed to tell him everything. He officially had a way to leave. He'd called the bank on the way back from the restaurant and talked to them at length about transferring the money, an amount he couldn't believe Susan had gotten away with, one that Neil somehow hadn't noticed. It was genius. It was his way out.

And he wanted Steve to come with him.

Needed him to.

They drove each other nuts. Between Steve's head and Billy's heart,

they were a recipe for disaster.

But Billy had never felt more alive in his life than in this past year. He'd never wanted anyone more than Steve. And he wanted that in California. He wanted it on the beach with frosty margaritas and sandcastles. He wanted it at the old amusement park on the pier with novelty prizes and cotton candy. He wanted it on midnight bike rides in the sweltering heat, on hikes with the smell of pine and towering redwoods surrounding them.

He was terrified and exhilarated. Suddenly everything around him seemed alive with energy, animated in a way he'd never imagined.

The first person he ran into was Chad and he quickly took him aside, told him about his plans to run. Chad was quiet through his speech and afterwards he told him that it was totally okay, that Billy deserved happiness and he needed to go where he would find it.

Billy told him about bringing Steve and Chad grinned, "Aw, I always knew you crazy kids would work things out."

Billy smiled and told him that he couldn't tell him exactly when he was leaving, that one day they would both just be gone. It would be easier that way, especially when Neil would inevitably come to ask where his son was.

"Just send a postcard when you get there, okay?"

Billy snorted. Postcards. What an ancient way of communicating. “Have you seen Steve?”

“Yeah, he’s around here somewhere. Dealing with some bullshit of his own.”

Billy frowned and wondered if it was to do with him. He knew better than to ask Chad though, the guy was really good at keeping shit to himself. It was almost annoying how honest and forthright he was.

Steve wasn’t in his room, or the kitchen, or the den. Thinking maybe he was out somewhere, Billy went to his room to take stock of his belongings, thought about what he absolutely needed to bring and what was unnecessary. There was stuff he needed at his house though, things hidden away that Neil would never find. He needed the other picture of his mother holding him, an old pair of tickets to a movie he’d seen with his first boyfriend, his favorite jacket. All sentimental things he couldn’t leave behind. He could get it during summer break. Then he’d be gone.

His mind was running a mile a minute, imagining everything he’d do once he was back home in California, all the things he’d show Steve, all the old friends he had to reconnect with. And through all of this he still couldn’t find Steve after another lengthy search through the house.

The roof . Of course the fucking roof.

Billy ran, climbed the ladder and slammed open the hatch.

“ *Jesus !*” Steve shouted. He was sitting in a chair, smoking a cigarette. His eyes were wide but tired. Seeing Billy, he flinched, looking wounded.

Billy was panting as he stepped from the ladder to the roof. “I need to talk to you.” Hands on his knees, he sucked in air and eyed Steve tentatively. He’d wanted this so bad, and now standing in front of him, he felt sheepish. Embarrassed.

“No.” Steve said firmly. He flicked his cigarette away and stood up, making moves to leave.

“Seriously, Steve. I *need* to talk to you.”

Come with me to California.

Abandon everything and everyone you know.

Shack up with me.

God, it was sounding more ludicrous in his head every second he stood there. His confidence was deflating rapidly, doubt coating his tongue, thoughts swarming.

“That’s really too bad.” Steve said bitterly, checking his shoulder as

he walked by.

He left through the hatch but Billy wasn't that easily deterred. He followed him down, let Steve stomp his way back to his room and slam the door in Billy's face. He knocked lightly, over and over until Steve caved and opened the door back up.

"Steve -- " He started but the boy walked past him. "Wait, where are you going?" Billy asked.

He followed him, talking a mile a minute, asking him over and over where he was heading, saying he needed to talk about something serious. Steve remained quiet, kept his eyes forward.

"You gonna talk to me?" Billy asked.

"Nope, no fucking point."

"You just gonna stay mad at me?"

"Yup."

They reached the stairs, Billy pattering down after him. "Steve -- "

"No, no fucking Steve. Don't. I'm not talking to you. You're not

talking to me. Got it?"

Billy was silent.

"*Got it ?*" Steve repeated, bending down and pulling on his shoes.

"I thought I wasn't talking to you."

"You're a dick."

"Speaking of dick -- "

"You're a fucking liar!" Steve shouted in his face, getting within centimeters of Billy before turning and storming out the front door.

That wasn't something Billy had been expecting. His lip curled down in confusion but he didn't stop following Steve. The other boy was pissed off so he kept his mouth shut as they headed towards the parking lot, Billy in just socks. He planned on sliding right into Harrington's car with him and making him listen, no matter what. Somewhere close, sirens rang out loud and shrill and there was a smell of smoke in the air. A fire nearby.

The sirens got closer. Billy and Steve rounded the tall trees separating the frat houses from the parking lot and both boys stopped in their tracks.

In the distance, not very far away, Steve's car was on fire.

The whole thing. It was on *fire* . Steve stared in disbelief. He dropped his keys. Billy ran ahead and got a look at the hood of the BMW. A big, black 'D' was spray painted there.

"Holy shit." Steve said quietly from behind, must've followed him once Billy had run ahead.

He turned his head. "Lemme guess. Dylan?"

Steve gaped at the car, made eye contact with Billy but then zoned in on the firetruck that was coming towards them. Onlookers were edged around the area, most too afraid to get much closer in case the thing decided to blow.

With that in mind, Billy grabbed Steve by the collar of his shirt and pulled him away. Steve was pliant, still staring back at the car as he was being led away.

"Fuck!" Steve suddenly screamed. "FUCK!!!"

*

Finals came and went and Steve could honestly say that he didn't

know how well he'd done. Summer break was here and everyone was excited, packed up and rolling suitcases away for their three-week vacation. Steve watched from the window of his room, standing incredibly still and staring until he thought *this behaviour isn't normal*.

The car fire. He could still smell the smoke, couldn't get the stench out of his clothes.

He'd had to give a report to the police about his car, told them about Dylan but said he didn't get a last name. He told them to question the staff at *Chariot*, they might know more than him. Billy stood next to him, hand on his shoulder, moving it to his back, brushing it over Steve's hand. He was trying to be helpful, to be present for Steve but the boy was busy biting his nails and fidgeting and running his hands through his hair repeatedly, holding bunches of it in a tight grip and pulling. He couldn't stop trembling. His eyes would dart back to the car being hosed down, drenched and blackened and he would swallow roughly, a wrinkle of anger forming between his brows as his face darkened. He was going through the stages of grief at a rapid pace, kept flitting back and forth between anger and resentment.

The police took the information down but told Steve not to get his hopes up. He was just fucked, not that they'd said it to him like that. But he was. Sure he had insurance, he wasn't an idiot, but his car was totaled and it wasn't going to be cheap. Insurance could only cover so much.

He'd called his parents after the police left. He lied and told them he didn't know who'd been responsible. They were upset and ultimately concerned for his safety because of the apparent maniac running around lighting cars on fire.

Billy still stayed with him. He was quiet the whole time, unsure of what to say. He'd never been good with offering sympathies, and having a dead mom himself, he hated when people would say shit like *I'm so sorry, You're not alone, I know what you're going through* . It was a car, not a person, but it was still a loss.

Once they'd started moving back towards the frat house, Billy tried to start a conversation. Steve had shut it down right away.

"I just lost my fucking car, I'm not in the mood. I can't do this right now, Billy. Do you get that?"

Billy had just nodded and left him alone.

And when summer break came, Billy was gone just like rest of the students.

There were only a couple guys staying at the frat over the break. He had the house mostly to himself. He spent the first four days walking around in the eerie quiet, wearing nothing but a white tank top covered in holes and a pair of boxer shorts.

He drank through those four days, alternating between cheap beer and even cheaper vodka -- staying as far away from dark liquor as he could. He spent time sitting in the library and listening to music on an antique radio that Caleb had fixed up, sitting in the backyard among the flowers that were slowly blooming, sitting on the roof and smoking cigarettes -- a habit he'd picked up since being around Billy.

Truthfully, he missed the smell.

He ate leftovers the guys had abandoned in the fridge -- spaghetti and au gratin potatoes, some casserole thing with fritos in it, half a birthday cake. There was something green and mushy that might've been guacamole at one point. Steve opted to toss that.

A kid that had joined when he had -- Pete -- sat in the living room, flicking through television channels. Steve joined him. They talked rarely, small bursts here and there but nothing substantial. Steve was grateful for it. They set up blankets and pillows and made it their space for a few days, only leaving for food and bathroom breaks. Pete smoked too. They opened the windows and puffed as they pleased. No one felt inclined to bother them. Pete kept offering him tabs of acid. Steve declined but Pete would tell him about the things he was seeing, when Steve looked like a dolphin, when the television started leaking and the show would inhabit the whole living room, the cereal characters *Snap*, *Crackle*, *Pop* sitting with them and debating whether the moon-landing was real. Steve listened and smiled and brought him bottles of water.

He seriously considered dropping out, but knew that was a bullshit thing to do. College students suffered, that was kind of a huge part of the deal. Sacrifice your time and your money and struggle for four years to hopefully get a degree towards a possible real job. Depending on the economy. Depending on the job market. What a shoddy plan.

He imagined trudging back home, showing up at his parents doorstep with his head down in shame, being welcomed back in and forced to get a job at some shithole in his rapidly depleting hometown. Hawkins was way behind with the times. The old mall had been shut down years ago, leaving the people who'd worked there essentially

jobless, scrambling like rats to get hired at McDonalds and gas stations and the one local diner that housed mostly truckers and crackheads. It was suicide. His dad was barely afloat at his own law office. His mother ran bingo games and helped set up VFW events. They did well together but that was the epitome of wealth out in small Hawkins.

Steve wanted more.

With that in mind he gave the notice he'd gotten in the mail one last read before dropping it in the overflowing kitchen trash can.

Lost in his thoughts, he barely registered that the doorbell was ringing. *Had been* ringing. In a zombie-state, he answered it and came face-to-face with Nancy.

She was in baby blue shorts and a light pink t-shirt. She had cheap glasses perched on her head and was snapping on some bubblegum.

"Wow, Steve. You look like hammered shit."

"Nancy." Less of a greeting, more of a statement.

"You haven't been answering your cell."

"It died." Steve replied.

“When?”

“Tuesday?” It was a question. Steve didn’t know the last time he looked at his phone.

“It’s been a week and a half.”

This news didn’t surprise him.

“Is he here?” Nancy asked.

“No.” Steve said icily. “I wouldn’t be here if he was.”

Her eyes went from narrowed and annoyed to open and soft. “Steve. You smell like shit.”

“It’s break, I’m allowed to do whatever I want.”

“And how’s your tyranny against hygiene going?”

“Fun, I think mushrooms are going to start growing under my arms.”

She made a face. "Come on, Steve. Go shower. Let's go get food."

"I don't want to go anywhere."

"Want to get drunk and recreate that scene from *Risky Business*?"

"Halfway there." Steve said, holding up and shaking the bottle of nearly-empty vodka at her.

"Good, find me some different sunglasses." She said, pushing past him and entering the house.

Steve sighed and shut the door. They didn't speak as Steve brought her up to his room.

"Give me that." She snapped, yanking the vodka from him.

She sat on his bed and sipped from it, making a face as it went down. "So is your car really gone?"

"Yup, off at some shop. Doubt I'll get it back though, the thing was pretty ruined."

"And it was that kid? The one you brought back?"

“Yup, never should’ve told him to fuck off.”

“Hey, Steve. This isn’t your fault. Don’t do that to yourself. That kid is a fucking psycho. You’ll get your car back. It’ll be okay.”

Steve’s face broke a little. He choked up a bit. “Nance, I’m broke. I’m so screwed. I’m -- ”

“Go shower.” She instructed.

“But -- ”

“Steve. It’ll make you feel better. And then we’ll go get lunch -- on me -- and we’ll go from there.”

He did what she said. He took off his filthy clothes and sagged against the tile in the shower, barely standing under the stream. He shut his eyes and let the steam envelope him in a reassuring heat.

Nancy sat on Steve’s bed, taking in the scene in front of her; dirty clothes all over the room, desk a mess with books open and pens everywhere, post-its littered about. There were plates crusted with food, empty beer cans spilling from the trash can onto the ground. She got off the bed and opened the window to get some air circulating.

She heard the door open and turned, gaping as Billy walked in.

They both stared dumbly at each other for a moment. Billy took a step closer.

“Look -- ”

Crack!

Nancy had bolted forward the last few steps to Billy, snapped her fist back and swung it forward, connecting with Billy’s nose, abruptly cutting off whatever he was about to say.

The boy stumbled back, clutching at his face and swearing loudly.

Nancy advanced. “Get the fuck out. I don’t want him to see you. Seriously, get the *fuck* out.”

“Shit, you can fucking hit.” Billy said, gingerly holding his nose, eyes screwed shut, a trickle of blood trailing down his lip.

“What are you even doing here?” She asked incredulously, no steam diminished in her fury.

“Came back early.” He swore again, looking up at the ceiling to stop

the blood from flowing.

“To see Steve.” Nancy finished for him.

“Whatever.” Billy said.

“Okay, whatever. Whatever’s good. But I’m here now, and I’m going to pick up the pieces of him you left.”

“What do you mean?” Billy asked angrily.

“He’s a fucking mess, Billy! A disaster. Look at this place!” She shouted, waving her hands around.

“Jesus, stop fucking yelling.”

“I have bear mace in my purse, Billy, and you have till the count of three. Go in your room, stay there. I don’t want him to know you’re back yet.”

Billy thought about it for a moment, about standing up to her and sticking around. “Do you really have bear mace?” He asked.

She pulled out an industrial sized can with a large nozzle, a small cone around it to prevent backlash into the eyes.

“Shit, Wheeler. Impressive.”

“One.” She started, fingers trained on the trigger.

“Fuck.” Billy said, turning and leaving the room.

His nose fucking *hurt* . He went back to his room and cleaned up. He stared at himself in the mirror, looking into his own eyes and cursing himself for being a huge idiot. Everything was in pieces. The only person he cared about was a wreck -- because of him. He put a bandaid on his nose, touching it lightly. He could tell it'd be a nasty patchwork of colors in a few days.

Billy sat on his bed and looked at the stuff in his room, boxes stacked and taped up, a suitcase full of things he'd gotten from his house.

Neil was tolerable of him the week and a half that he'd stuck around, only for the fact that he needed Billy to help him out at the hardware store. Neil had also taken it upon himself to get a female friend of his (god knows how Neil had female friends) to send their daughter into the store and introduce herself to Billy, obviously fishing for a date.

It was pathetic. It made Billy angry. He shot her down nicely and that night had went home and packed his stuff. Neil was out drinking so it was easy to do. Susan and Max had packed as well. Billy hadn't expected them to be ready to go at the same time that he was but fuck it, let Neil come home to nothing, let him be responsible for his shitty actions. It was for the best. They said their goodbyes, tearful

and filled with hugs. Susan gave him a number to call her at *if he needed anything, anything at all* .

He pocketed the number and hugged Max for a long time, rubbing her back as she cried and telling her that they'd see each other before she knew it.

They went their separate ways, both leaving the house filled with nothing but bad memories in the distance. Billy watched their headlights disappear in his rearview mirror and silently wished them the best, pressing his foot down harder on the gas and feeling a little lighter already.

Now Billy was free. Neil would assume Billy had went back to school, but would have no idea where Susan and Max had went.

Much to his surprise, he hadn't gotten a phone call yet. Maybe Neil hadn't noticed they were gone, or maybe he was too ashamed to admit what he already knew.

Needing a distraction from his throbbing nose, he left for the kitchen, stomach rumbling. He only had a few days left in the frat house and took his time walking down the hallway, looking at all the pictures along the wall. He found one of his dad, even at that age he had a face of steel, eyes blazing. Billy sneered at it, resisted punching and breaking the glass.

Once in the kitchen he grabbed a beer from the fridge and looked around at all the *stuff* . God, he really hadn't taken advantage of everything available to him in the house.

Billy stood leaning back against one of the counters, sipping from his beer. An open letter sitting at the top of the trashcan next to him caught his attention, specifically the name at the beginning.

He picked it up, read it quickly and tossed it back into the trash. Fuck. *Fuck* .

Billy pulled out his phone, calling the bank he'd spoken to previously. After a few questions, the line went silent for a moment.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Hargrove, but that account has been frozen."

"What? How, it shouldn't have been. It's not supposed to -- "

"I'm sorry sir, the owner of the main account has called in claiming identity theft and all issues with that account will need to be dealt with through our security line. Would you like me to connect you?"

"No." Billy said quietly. "No, thanks."

He hung up, staring at the fridge magnets. He felt the plan he'd so carefully constructed slipping away, dismantling before his eyes.

He drained his beer fast.

He needed to find Caleb.

*

Billy didn't expect Caleb to be on campus -- but he was according to his text. He was holed up in his room. Billy pushed the door open, a towel shoved under the door making it a bit difficult. The space was a mess of wires haphazardly hanging everywhere and there were small tables he had brought in and pushed up against every available space, all loaded with electronics and tools. He spotted at least five computers, four were laptops, one was a desktop clearly in the process of being assembled by Caleb himself. There were mechanical devices opened, insides exposed and pulled apart. There was some sort of self-made lamp that was mostly bits of wire tacked to two-by-fours with light bulbs screwed into it. There was a smell of smoke, sharp and metallic.

It looked insane.

"Caleb?" Billy called out.

"In here," a muffled response came from the left.

Billy opened the door to Caleb's closet and found the boy tucked inside, facing away from Billy at a small desk, soldering gun in hand, huge goggles strapped on his face.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Billy asked. “This is a fire hazard you know.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Caleb said, pushing the goggles up, irises contracting in the light. There were indents around his eyes, implying that he’d been doing this for awhile. “What d’ya need? I’m in the middle of something.”

“Yeah, sorry Bruce Banner, but I need you.”

“Banner was a nuclear physicist,” was all Caleb said.

“Alright, you out-geeked me, congratulations.”

“So, what’d ya need?” Caleb asked, clearly itching to get back to his work.

“What if I told you I needed some money transferred from a frozen account?”

Caleb grinned, toothy and interested. “Really? Sounds illegal.”

“I can cut you in -- ”

“Won’t be necessary, I’m in.”

Billy straightened. “Just like that?” He asked.

Caleb shrugged. “Sure, summer break is *boring*. Need to find *something* to do.”

“So what do you need from me?” Billy asked.

“Name of the account you want the money moved from, and the name of the receiving account.” He shifted his goggles back over his eyes and turned away from Billy.

“What’s the time frame for this?” Billy asked.

“It’ll be done by the end of the day. Just need a name for the account.”

Billy blinked, dumbfounded. “End of the day? As in *to day*?”

Caleb sighed, pausing his work and straightening his back but not turning as he spoke. “Yes, Billy, that’s what end of the day means. Now, the names?”

Billy drummed his fingers against his side, stalling for a moment. “Neil Hargrove and...Steve Harrington.”

Caleb didn't move for a few seconds before hunching back down and firing up his gun again. "Alright. It'll be done."

"Thanks, and Caleb? Open a window."

"Yeah, yeah." Caleb murmured.

Billy left.

Things were changing rapidly. He could still leave, hell, he had to if this was actually going to happen. Neil would try to find him once the money was gone, would want to ring his neck when he found out that Billy didn't have it. But he wouldn't know where it had gone. Steve would be safe.

He had an epitome. He realized he was *selfish* for wanting Steve to come with him. The fever-dream was just that -- a dream. He couldn't pull Steve out of school, couldn't take him away from a family that loved him. The concept was totally lost on Billy, but Steve had that. He had Nancy. He had a future, bright and shiny and *possible*. Billy would only have what he chased after and fought for. He couldn't resound Steve to that fate. Not when he deserved so much more.

He could still go to California. He could play his guitar on the street for some quick cash before finding a real job -- somewhere. Fuck college. Fuck engineering. He'd never wanted any of it. All of it had been to appease Neil. He was done with that shit.

Back in his room, he made some quick decisions about his belongings. He could sell his turntable and his nice speakers, would even hock his laptop for the time being to get the cash he needed. He wasn't going to let this stop him.

Out of his nightstand, he removed a picture. It was the one taken when all the pledges got together for the first time, a big group of hopeful smiles.

In it, Steve was smiling, his shorts too big, his shirt too small. He had a pair of sunglasses on. Billy remembered the meeting well.

There was a knock at his door. He slipped the photograph back into the nightstand and went over to answer it. He wasn't expecting to see Steve.

"Oh." Was his smooth greeting.

"You're back." Steve said. He was surprised.

Billy snorted. "Nancy tell you?"

"You saw her?"

"Yeah, that's where the nice busted-up nose came from." He said,

touching his face gingerly. It still stung. He could've taken some ibuprofen but the pain was a reminder of his own bullshit, the mess he had made. The chaos.

"Shit. And no. Chad told me. Said to come find you."

"Don't know why he'd do that." Billy shook his head, pushing the door open more for Steve to come in.

"So I've been very fucking pissed off at you."

"Yeah, I gathered that." Billy said.

They stood across from each other, arms crossed, making brief eye contact from time to time.

"You *lied* to me." Steve said.

There it was again, that accusation. "About what?"

"I don't know Billy, do you want the list chronologically or alphabetically?"

"Steve, if you want to tell me, then tell me. I'm not a mind reader."

“Initiation.” Was the only word Steve bit out.

Billy blinked at that, eyes widening. His heart dropped to his stomach. “Steve, I. I was going to *tell* you.”

“Well, Chad did.”

“Wow. Fuck.” Billy let out a small breath.

“Yeah so I just wanted to tell you that I know. And that I really hate you for that. So. I guess that’s it.”

He turned, moving towards the door.

Billy had to stop him. Steve had to know the truth.

“Ya know, the first time we met? It wasn’t the first time.” He blurted out.

Steve froze where he was, hand poised on the doorknob. After a couple of seconds, he whipped his head around, was holding his breath. “What do you mean?”

Billy plowed on. “Your first day of class, you ended up in the wrong one. In Advanced Multivariable Calculus if I remember correctly.”

And Billy did remember correctly. He would *never* forget it.

“They did roll call and you raised your hand, asking if your name was on the list. *Steve Harrington, is there a Steve Harrington on it?* There wasn’t and you left, but not before dropping all your shit at the door. I was in the back row. That’s the first time I saw you. Later that day you bumped into me in the hall, and you were so overwhelmed you didn’t apologize, just asked me to point you to Creative Writing. I did...and you smiled at me.”

“I don’t remember this.” Steve was staring off into space, trying desperately to recall his first day of school. He did remember ending up in the wrong class, did remember dropping all of his stuff but seeing Billy? He couldn’t remember that at all.

“And that’s when I knew I had to meet you. You can’t imagine how I felt when I saw your name on the pledge roster.”

“So. You lied to me. To sleep with me.”

“You could’ve said no.” Billy raised an eyebrow.

“And been denied membership?” Steve said incredulously.

“I was going to get you in.”

“Well I didn’t *know* that, Billy. It was coercion. Sick, twisted coercion.”

“I know. I thought fucking you would get it out of my system, but then you. Just kept coming to me, asking me stuff, wanting to know me, telling your friends about me -- ”

“Just Nancy -- ”

“I couldn’t avoid you, not really. You were always this presence I was completely aware of.”

“You hide it pretty fucking well.”

“Then I realized I...that I cared. *Care* about you.”

“Shut the fuck up.” Steve snarled, hands forming to fists. “Don’t fucking say that, don’t say it to my face. Not when it’s so obviously leading up to a *but we can’t see each other anymore* .”

“Steve,” Billy was exasperated. “I can’t. I can’t let you become like me. You can’t get so bottled up and be afraid to get close to someone.”

“A bit late on that one, Hargrove.” Steve’s eyes flashed.

The last name stung, hit Billy in the face and he flinched. “Look, I know I fucked up. And I hope one day you can forgive me.”

Steve glared at him harder before looking away. “I wasn’t going to bring this up but, you told me you loved me.”

Billy tensed, arms tight across his chest. Protecting and deflecting. “So what if I did? I don’t exactly get the things I want. And I definitely don’t deserve most of them.”

“You really fucking hate yourself, don’t you, Billy? So much that you have to drag down the people that care about you. Right down to your level till they’re too fucked up to do anything except mourn.”

No reply so Steve kept pushing. “I might’ve actually cared about you. I really could’ve ya know.”

“And now?” Billy prompted.

Steve shook his head, voice wavering “You make it too *hard*. You don’t want to be happy. Your dad -- ”

“My dad is a fucking asshole and I’m done with him. I’m never seeing him again.” Billy told him firmly.

Steve snorted. "Oh yeah? Why's that?"

Billy opened his mouth to reply but shut it immediately.

He couldn't. Steve didn't need to know anything. The less Billy told him, the better.

"Why's all your stuff packed up?" Steve asked out of the blue, looking around the room.

Billy blinked, looked around, cleared his throat. "Uh. Just moving room's. Don't like this one." He shrugged.

"You're. Moving rooms." Steve repeated, obviously not believing him. One of his eyebrows was ticked up and he was looking at Billy, accusing him by not saying anything.

"Yeah, don't worry about it." Billy brushed it off, tore his eyes away to stop from feeling guilty.

Steve bristled. Once again, he wasn't getting any answers. "Fine. I won't."

He left, slamming the door behind him.

A sound Billy didn't want to admit he made punched out of him. He covered his eyes with the palm of his hand, pushing the tears away. *He deserves more. He doesn't need you fucking up his life anymore. Just leave. Just get away from him. You're no good anyways.*

Notes for the Chapter:

Jesus this was a hard chapter to write. There's only going to be one more and I'll warn you: this isn't going to be a happy ending.

This little one-shot turned porn-with-plot really became something bigger than I ever thought it would. Each and every person who comments, leaves kudos, etc is AMAZING and I appreciate every single one of them. You guys have been my motivation to keep going. I hope it's worth it.

follow me on tumblr: [valkyrie0cain](#)
or my harringrove exclusive sideblog: [harrygroves](#)

so on my regular tumblr, i was blocked MONTHS AGO from accessing it on the web browser (so i can only use mobile which is a fucking nightmare). i am unable to reply to posts or answer questions and after battling it out with tumblr and microsoft for literally a whole year, i caved and made a second blog because none of my posts show up in the tags and it's infuriating.

8. i never stopped

It's five in the morning when Billy sneaks into Steve's room. His car is loaded up and he's got his backpack slung over one shoulder. Steve's sleeping soundly, one leg pulled up at a ninety-degree angle, the other stretched out. He's only in boxers. His hair is all over the place.

He's never looked so good. He's serene, face slack and soft. Steve's busy dreaming, or perhaps it's an empty sleep, satisfying and deep. Billy's busy memorizing every detail.

He drops his backpack and slides forward, quiet and careful. He takes a seat at the edge of the bed and freezes when Steve shifts, murmurs something intelligible.

Billy waits a few moments before reaching out and touching Steve's ankle, holds it and stares, eyes trailing up; over the swell of his ass, up his dimpled back to broad shoulders, to his face cocked to the side so he can see Steve's open mouth, watches as he breathes in and out with a little wheeze; Billy stares and absorbs until finally letting out a harsh breath.

"I'm so sorry." He whispers. He doesn't know *why* he says it, as if Steve's belongings are going to take the apology and let Steve know later once he wakes up, but he can't help but say it. Billy lets go of his ankle and stands, moving closer till he's standing directly in front of Steve's face.

He reaches a hand out, curls his fingers back for a second, doubting

himself, but as he bites his lip he continues his movement and runs a hand through Steve's hair.

Steve moves again, wrinkles his nose and says something Billy can't understand.

"Steve." Billy says softly.

Steve's eyes crack open, then shut again. "What?" He slurs, and Billy knows he's still asleep, not fully comprehending.

"I gotta go for a bit, okay?" Billy says.

"Yeah, okay." He's still completely out of it. He's not registering any of this. Won't *remember* it. Billy's counting on that.

He leans in and puts his lips on Steve's temple, at the corner of his eye. He stays there until he feels a tear creeping down his face.

Billy pulls away and wipes at his eyes.

"Shit." He whispers.

"Bill..." Steve suddenly mumbles and *god* , if *that* doesn't pull at Billy's heart.

Billy get up fast, needs to leave before he changes his mind. *Can't* because of what he's done with Neil's money.

His decisions been made. Now he needs to follow-through till the end.

He pulls an envelope out of his back pocket and places it at the end of Steve's bed. He grabs his backpack and quickly leaves, giving himself one last glance at Steve before he shuts the door.

Billy doesn't expect anyone to be awake but when he makes it down the stairs Chad is coming from the kitchen, stands in the entryway of it and watches as Billy shoves his feet into his boots.

"You sure about this?" Chad asks, holding a cup of coffee. Steam curls up and Billy feels like staying for a minute, indulging in a cup and shooting the shit. Just to pretend like it's a normal day.

He *can't*, he reminds himself.

"Sure as I can be." Billy lies.

Chad nods. "Here." He stretches out his hand, is holding a wad of bills in a rubber band.

“Chad. No, I can’t.” Billy says, inching back.

“Billy, just take it. Sleep in a hotel for a night or two on your way to Cali. Just *take it*.”

Billy holds back but only for a moment and takes the money with a shudder. “Thanks. Thank you, Chad.”

“Yeah. Be good.” He says and Billy barrels forward, wraps his arms around Chad who hugs him back.

“Keep my dad away from Steve.” Billy begs. “Please, *please*.” His voice is breaking, chest expanding and falling rapidly as the knowledge of what he’s about to *do* courses through him. Panic is setting in and he needs to curb it.

“Won’t let him touch a hair on his head, I promise.” Chad replies. He holds Billy as long as Billy needs. “Get rid of your phone, okay? If your dad is crazy enough he could have the cops trace it.” Chad gives him all sorts of advice. *Don’t use any credit cards. If you need to stop somewhere, make it a short visit. Only go to hotels at night and wear a hat. Consider cutting your hair.*

They break away from each other and Billy sniffs, his stomach is burning with regret. He doesn’t *want* to go out the front door knowing he’ll never come back.

“Okay. I gotta do this.” Billy says and nods at Chad who nods back

and Billy turns, forcing his hand to operate the knob and his legs to move him outside.

He breathes in the humid air, it chokes him and he coughs, but suspects it's more to chase away sobs more than anything. He beelines over to the parking lot, thinks about Steve's car on fire and for a wild moment he thinks that maybe his will be on fire too, like Neil was already there waiting with a beer and a can of gasoline.

He's *not* there and Billy's got clearance to leave.

He sits in his car and smokes a cigarette, lets the radio play softly and keeps his car in park. His hands are on the steering wheel and his arms are shaking.

"Go, just go. You need to *leave*." He's alone now and doesn't stop the tears from flowing, just snuffles and keeps his eyes down to keep a little privacy if anyone *does* happen to walk by.

He lets out a rough sound, it crawls out of his throat and punches through the silence sharply. He grips his gear shift and puts it in drive then slowly pulls the car out of the lot.

*

Steve's eyes open, he blinks drearily in the early-morning light. His foot kicks out and he knocks something off his bed. He ignores it and gets to his feet, scratches his back and stretches his arms up, enjoying

the crack of his limbs.

He needs to find a job *today*. Sometime between classes he's got to hit every restaurant, coffee shop and retail store and find something that will keep him afloat. He shudders at the thought of minimum wage, working forty hours while going to school and trying to keep up with his social life. Not that it's breached beyond the hub of Nancy and his frat brothers.

After changing, he goes downstairs and gets a cup of coffee from the pot that's still warm. He holds it in his hands gratefully and lets out a hum of content. Things might be shit, but caffeine will always help. Dark and hot caffeine goodness.

"Steve?" He turns his head and sees Chad coming in from the living room.

"What's up?" Steve asks, sipping greedily from his cup.

Chad looks *worried*. It's *weird*. He's usually a very calm and level-headed person but he seems anxious now. It sets Steve a little on edge. He shifts his weight from one foot to the other and waits for Chad to find his words. Chad's eyes are darting all over the place, like he can't keep his thoughts straight.

Finally, he speaks. "Billy, he -- "

Steve cuts him off. "I've decided to forgive him. It's time to move on

from all this shit. I'm gonna talk to him, okay?"

Chad blinks slowly, looks down and swallows hard. "Steve. He's *gone*."

At first, Steve doesn't *understand*. He cocks his head to the side and gives Chad a look that said *okay, what's the joke?* But Chad doesn't move his eyes, keeps gazing at Steve with *pity*. Steve's face contorts for a second, then crumples. He sets his coffee down on the counter.

"Gone?" He echoes.

"He left. Hours ago." Chad tells him somberly.

Steve moves forward half a step, shaky and confused. "I-I'm sure he's just *out*. He'll be back later."

His mind flashes images of the packed boxes, the look in Billy's eyes, how he seemed to have something to say but wouldn't just *come out* with it.

"What?" Steve says absently, mind racing.

He rushes past Chad who yells after him and takes the steps two at a time, running until he gets to Billy's door. He knocks, shouts Billy's name and knocks again. He opens the door and it's *empty*. All of Billy's posters are gone, his bed is stripped.

Steve can't feel his hands. His legs wobble as he walks into the room, looking for any sign that Billy might still be there.

He's *not*. Everything is gone.

He thinks about Neil, thinks that maybe Billy's dad came to take him away, thinks about all the ways Billy could be *hurt*.

His phone rings. It's an unknown number and he answers it immediately.

"Hello?" His voice is strained as if he's been screaming.

"Mr. Harrington, we want to thank you for depositing money into your account to allow further payments to be made towards your student balance."

It's the admin office. Steve almost hangs up, but the words register before he ends the call.

"What?" He says weakly.

"If you have any problems paying us in the future please don't hesitate to come and speak to someone in financial aid. We're here to help! Have a great day!"

He hangs up and goes into the bank app on his home screen.

Steve's...suddenly *loaded* . He stares at the number in his account and doesn't know what to *think*.

It's got to be a mistake.

He chews his lips, contemplates calling his parents but he doesn't. If they *did* give him the money, they would've *said* something.

He looks around the empty room again.

Decides he won't accept it.

He runs back to his room, pulls his clothes off and hunts around for jeans.

A million thoughts are running through his head. Did Billy leave the state? The *country* . He's looking for his phone when he spots an envelope on the ground.

It has his name on it in black sharpie.

He grabs it and opens it, pulls out a letter on notebook paper.

Dear

Harrington

Steve

Dude

You're going to be so mad. And confused. I get that but I can't give you any information to contact me. You're probably wondering where the money came from. I can't answer that either. This is a situation I need you to trust my judgement on. I know I've done nothing that gives me any merit, but. You gotta.

I didn't mean to mess your life up so bad. None of this should have happened. I hope the rest of your time in the frat will go smoothly.

I'm going to miss your stupid face.

It's not stupid though.

Don't try to find me. Just don't.

If my dad shows up, lock yourself in your room and don't come out until he's gone.

You're going to graduate and become some big fucking success and I really want that for you.

I do love you.

Billy

Steve reads it twice. He doesn't *understand* .

"No...no, absolutely not." He says to himself and finishes getting dressed, grabs his keys and beelines for the front door.

Chad's there, waiting.

"Steve. No ."

"Chad, I swear to god, get the fuck out of my way." Steve says, pushing at his shoulders.

“You don’t even know where he is!” Chad shouts.

“Do you?” Steve asks, eyes wide and angry and sad at the same time.

Chad shakes his head, still looks at Steve with pity. “He could literally be anywhere.”

“I don’t care! I’m going! I’m going to...to...” He trails off, he’s *shaking* , keys jingling a little in his hand.

“Steve. Just calm down.” Chad tries to be level, tries to coerce him like he’s *five* .

“Why did he leave? Where did the money come from? Why the *fuck* did he *leave?!* ”

“Steve. It’s. There was a lot going on. A lot with his family.”

“I’m going to find him.” Steve’s not listening anymore.

“Steve, you have a *rental* , you can’t take it outside the state, the police will think you’re running.”

Steve pushed past him, grabbed his shoes and left the house. He got to his nice, white SUV and leaned against it, panting.

“What the *fuck* .” He said, tears flowing freely.

He had been so *mad* . So *angry* . He’d said really fucked up things.

He hadn’t been *wrong* , but he was...regretful.

He turned around, back to the car, and sunk down onto the ground.

*

Three months.

Three months.

Not a fucking word.

Steve’s car was completely out of commision. The insurance company hooked him up with another one, same model.

He took his tests, handed in essays and worksheets and pretended to care about the theater productions performance of *Wicked* .

He did the chores delegated to him by his frat brothers.

He talked with them, drank, had Sunday dinners and pretended he was okay.

He wasn't but he didn't want to be bothered.

Couldn't bear to hear someone say Billy's name.

Three months and not a word. Neil hadn't popped up, Steve stopped worrying about it.

Chad hung around him a lot, Garrett too. It was a bit annoying but it took him out of his own thoughts.

Three months and Steve was starting to wake up...not *happy* , but not a black pit of despair anymore.

Three months and then his phone rang.

UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN

Three missed calls while he'd been sleeping. And of course he couldn't *call* them back.

No voicemail, probably just a scam.

The second night it happened he woke up and answered it.

"Hello?"

Silence on the other end. No breathing, no noise. Nothing.

"Hello?" He said again.

The line clicked.

He stared at his phone and his stomach gave a flip.

He stayed awake, waiting for the phone to ring again.

It didn't and when the sun was poking through his shades he let out a groan, rubbing at his face.

His phone didn't flash UNKNOWN again, not for another two weeks.

This time it was late, really late, past four in the morning.

He stared at his phone, contemplated ignoring it, but that wasn't even an option. Not really.

He answered it. "Billy?"

This time there was sound. Shouting, music, clinks of silverware.

"Billy." He said firmer.

He was *not* going to cry.

"Are you going to say anything?" He asked.

Nothing.

"Fine. Okay. I don't know why you're calling. I don't know why you left without talking to me. I don't know why you bothered telling me you cared about me when you lied to me constantly, right up to the end. I don't get *any* of this. I don't know why you gave me all that

money.”

He took a deep breath.

This wasn't the plan. He had mapped out how this conversation was supposed to go. This was completely off-script.

“I don't want your money. I don't want you to keep me *safe* . Just tell me where you *are* .”

Still, he didn't get any reply.

“Fuck you. Stop calling me.”

He hung up.

Well, he *definitely* hadn't want to say *that* .

*

Billy listened to him. He didn't call.

Christmas rolled around. Steve went home. Nancy tried to be there

for him, she'd been *trying* for months. Steve was numb to it.

His mother knew something was off. He wouldn't tell her.

His dad asked him if he was doing drugs. Steve told him no.

The day after Christmas he got a message request on facebook from Max Mayfield.

He clicked it open.

Hey, this is Billy's step-sister. I just wanted to let you know he visited me and my mom in California. He's doing fine. He'd kill me if he knew I was talking to you. I just wanted you to know he's safe.

Steve stared at the message, deleted it before he could change his mind.

New Years. Snowy, blistering cold, sitting in his dorm room.

There was a part going on downstairs. It was the last thing Steve wanted to do.

He *wanted* to walk out into the snow and let the cold take him.

He stared out the window but didn't really *see* . He was stuck in his head.

There was a knock on the door. He ignored it.

There was a louder, longer knock.

"I'm not in the *mood* !" He shouted.

The door opened anyways.

He whipped around, ready to unload onto whoever dared disturb his depressive episode but the words died in his throat.

He was tan, thin like he hadn't been eating. There was snow melting on his shoulders and in his hair.

He was *smiling* .

"Billy?" The word sounded so foreign on his tongue.

Steve rose from his desk chair, wondered if he was having a dream or maybe passed out and seizing and not *really* seeing this.

He wobbled forward, then pitched forward and flew into him, wrapping his arms around the hard body, the very *real* body.

“Billy?” He said again. “What’re you...I don’t...”

“Steve.”

He *broke* at hearing his voice.

He didn’t want to cry and he squeezed his eyes together.

“You *asshole* !” Steve said, trying to talk around the need to cry. He pulled away, pushed at Billy angrily.

“Steve, look.”

“No! *Look* , you look! I’ve been...I’ve been a fucking *mess* , okay? I’ve been a fucking *wreck* . Do you know how *stupid* I feel? Stop looking at me like that!” He was shouting, angry and open like the cork had finally been popped and nothing could stop all those bubbles from spilling out.

Billy took his jacket off, threw it aside. He walked up to Steve who held his hands out.

“Don't, you can't kiss your way out of this, don't *touch* me.” He tried to push away Billy's hands but he was stronger than Steve, grabbed his arms and made him stop moving.

“I hated leaving you.” He said.

Steve's lip wobbled. He shook his head. “You're a liar.”

“I *missed* you.” Billy continued.

“You *left* .”

“I love you.” Billy said, shooting Steve right in the heart.

Steve didn't have a reply to that.

“I do. I love you. *So much*.”

Billy let his arms go but didn't move away, didn't give Steve any space.

“What about your dad?”

“He’s not going to bother us. I called a friend I had back in town. He’s drinking himself to death, already found a new woman with a kid. He gave up.”

“You love me?” Steve asked, eyes scanning over Billy’s face for any sign of regret or insecurity.

“I do. I really really do. I’ve been in *hell* .”

“Eight months.” Steve said. “You’ve been gone eight months, twelve days. *I’ve* been in hell.” Steve told him.

“I won’t leave again.”

“Don't say that cause I know you can't keep that promise.”

Billy reached out and took Steve’s face in his hands, crowded up against him.

“I’m not going to let you go again. If you’re willing to put up with my shit, the bad stuff, I’m willing to spend every day convincing you how much I love you.”

“Fuck, you’re this good with words and you couldn’t write a decent letter?” Steve says.

Billy shuts him up with his mouth. The kiss is heaven, Steve feels it in his toes. He clutches at Billy and they don't stop, they don't come up for air even as Billy gets Steve on the bed.

They hold each other, spoon as Steve tries to absorb the fact that Billy's actually there with him.

Billy kisses his eyes, his nose, his cheek. Steve runs his fingers through Billy's hair, wet from the snow.

"You went to California." Steve says.

"Yeah, you knew?"

"I figured that's where you would go. I wanted to come look for you. Chad wouldn't let me."

"I made him promise." Billy said, puts his mouth against Steve's neck. "I missed your voice. Your eyes. Your mouth. I couldn't *stand* being so far away."

"You called me."

"Yeah, but I felt like I was making it worse."

“You did. It sucked.”

“I’m sorry.” Billy whispers, kissing his skin softly.

“I know. You’re gonna spend every day making it up to me.”

“Promise.”

Steve can feel Billy’s dick through his jeans. It’s hot and hard and makes Steve shiver.

But it’s not about that.

It’s about the familiar weight of Billy against him, the smell of cigarette smoke and cologne. It’s about how perfectly pink his mouth is and how blue his eyes are.

It’s the way his nose crinkles when he laughs, how his teeth flash when Steve says something stupid.

It’s about how much he missed the sound of Billy’s laugh and his calloused hands.

How Billy's always going to have a bit of bite to him, how he'll always bitch about the music Steve likes and how Steve only drinks light beer.

There's always going to be some pun Steve will say that Billy will roll his eyes at, always some shitty underground band Steve doesn't get but will listen to anyways.

They're going to have to work at this every day, every *minute* and Steve's not sure how it's going to end. But that's the part he's most excited about.

"I love you too." Steve tells him.

Notes for the Chapter:

Honestly? This has been sitting in my WIP folder for MONTHS. I needed it to end. I needed it to be over.

I was going to write a horrible, awful, not-happy ending but I couldn't. Didn't have it in me.

I'm sorry if it's short, I'm sorry if it's a let-down, but I needed this to be finished.

And seriously, it wasn't meant to go past one chapter so.

I hope you enjoyed the world I tried to create. I hope you enjoyed the side characters.

I researched the most random shit for this fic but it's been a blast to work on.

Maybe I'll go back and re-do the last chapter someday, but here's what I have in me for now.